TOWN OF COCHRANE

STRATEGIC PLAN & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

ONTARIO, CA
COCHRANE
WONDERFULLY UNEXPECTED

WELCOME

Cochrane, Ontario – where we take pride in being Wonderfully Unexpected.

Where the warmth of community intertwines seamlessly with the echoes of our heritage, where polar bears dance amidst the charm of simplicity, where connection isn't just a word, it's our Way of Life.

Where neighbours aren't just faces passing by, but cherished members of our community, where we celebrate our Diversity, and where we open our hearts and our doors to all who seek a place to belong, where every culture is honored, and every individual is valued.

And, where together, we create a hometown that's Healthy, vibrant, and prosperous for everyone, now and for generations to come.

TOWN OF COCHRANE

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT & COMMITMENT STATEMENT

In the spirit of respect, reciprocity, and truth, we acknowledge and are grateful to live, work, and play on the traditional lands of the Omushkegowuk Cree. We recognize and deeply appreciate the contributions of all the Omushkegowuk Cree First Nations, including Taykwa Tagamou, Apitipi Anicinapek Nation, Nishnawbe-Aski, Attawapiskat, Moose Cree First Nation, Constance Lake First Nation as well as Métis, Inuit, and all Indigenous peoples who have cared for this land over generations.

We are committed to our journey towards reconciliation and through open dialogue, active listening, and genuine partnership, we pledge to honour Indigenous perspectives, uphold Indigenous rights, and work together towards a future where all voices are heard, and all people are empowered to thrive.

We are committed to embracing diversity and fostering meaningful collaboration with our Indigenous partners for a future built on mutual respect, understanding, and prosperity.

We make this commitment to action and as a shared endeavour, we aim to create a healthier, equitable, and just future for everyone.

FORWARD

In mid-2023, the Corporation of the Town of Cochrane issued two separate Public Request for Proposals ("RFP"), RFP#2023-24 Strategic Plan and RFP#2023-22 Economic Development Strategic Plan, delivered through the Town's e-procurement site "Bids & Tenders" inviting proposals from qualified firms. The purpose of the public RFP process was to select a qualified firm to enter into a services agreement with the Town of Cochrane to complete the work as outlined in each RFP.

Introducing a municipal strategic plan is akin to laying the groundwork for a town's evolution and prosperity. It serves as a comprehensive blueprint, outlining goals, priorities, and actionable steps to guide the community toward a brighter future. It represents a collective vision crafted through collaboration between local government, residents, businesses, and other stakeholders.

An economic development plan involves identifying and executing initiatives aimed at stimulating local business, attracting investment, and creating job opportunities to improve the overall economic well-being and quality of life for residents. It also encompasses strategic efforts to leverage the town's unique assets and promote sustainable growth within the community.

Integrating economic development seamlessly into the broader municipal strategic framework ensures alignment with overarching goals and priorities, maximizing synergy and efficiency. By intertwining economic development with other key areas such as infrastructure, social services, and environmental sustainability, municipalities can create holistic strategies that address multifaceted challenges and capitalize on emerging opportunities. This integrated approach not only streamlines decision-making processes but also fosters a cohesive vision for the town's future, driving sustainable and inclusive growth.

WMC Management Services Ltd. submitted individual proposals in response to each RFP and within each proposal, we clearly outlined the inherent synergy between municipal strategic planning and economic development and that by consolidating these endeavours, it would result in a comprehensive, realistic plan poised to maximize efficiency and make a positive impact for the benefit of the Town of Cochrane. Following a review of all proposals, WMC was invited to be interviewed as a potentially qualified firm to complete the work. In our interview, we demonstrated our expertise and emphasized the importance and substantial benefits of integrating both RFPs into a single initiative. We were successful in our proposal and work officially began in late November of 2023.

Strategic planning is not a one-size-fits-all solution but rather a targeted plan designed to resonate authentically within the local context.

In approaching this project for the Town of Cochrane, we emphasized a customized strategy tailored to the unique needs, successes, and contexts of the community. This customization was paramount, as it recognized the diversity, challenges, and strengths within the community; ensuring that engagements

were not only relevant to the project but also effective for planning ahead and implementing the plan. By embracing a customized approach, we were able to foster greater trust, engagement, and ownership among community stakeholders. Moreover, this tailored approach enabled us to pinpoint particular barriers and formulate a plan that integrates an economic development component, while also aligning with the community's vision for the future direction of its Town.

RECOGNITION

WMC would like to recognize and thank the following individuals, groups, and communities for their guidance, commitment, and assistance throughout the process.

- Town of Cochrane Project Team
  - Richard Vallee, Monika Malherbe, Elisabeth Dupuis
- Council Members
  - Peter Politis, France Bouvier, Daniel Brunet, Sylvie Charron-Lemieux, Rodney Hoogenhoud, Susan Nelson, Marck Recoskie
- Town of Cochrane Economic Development Steering Board
- Town of Cochrane Board of Trade
- MICS Group of Health Services & Cochrane Family Health Team
- Tourism Cochrane
- Federal Economic Development Agency for Northern Ontario
- Railway Cafe
- Indigenous Communities of Taykwa Tagamou First Nation, Apitipi Anicinapek First Nation, and Moose Cree First Nation
- Metis Nation of Ontario
- Northeast Association for Community Living
- Cochrane District Social Services Administration Board
- Ontario Northeast District School Board
- Ontario Northland
- Destination Northern Ontario & Northern Ontario Tourist Outfitters Association (NOTO)
- All of the families, individuals, seniors' groups, and local businesses who individually shared their history, passion, and insights for the future of Cochrane
- All those who attended the public open houses and engagement events

TABLE OF CONTENTS

WELCOME **2**
LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT & COMMITMENT STATEMENT 3
FORWARD **4**
RECOGNITION 5
MESSAGE FROM MAYOR & COUNCIL **7**
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY **9**
PHASE 1 11
PHASE 2 11
PHASE 3 11
CONTEXT & METHODOLOGY **14**
WHAT IS STRATEGIC PLANNING 14
CONSIDERATIONS FOR PLANNING 15
GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR THE PROJECT 15
ENGAGEMENT METHODOLOGY 16
FIRST IMPRESSIONS COMMUNITY ANALYSIS 16
JOIN THE CONVERSATION 17
STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS 18
DESK RESEARCH 18
CLOSED SESSION PLANNING/ADMINISTRATION INSIGHT 19
PUBLIC OPEN HOUSE(S) 20
WALKING TOUR & 24-HOURS IN THE DOWNTOWN 20
STRENGTHS, CHALLENGES, OPTIONS, RISK/RESPONSE, AND EFFECTIVENESS (SCOR^{2}E) **21**
STRENGTHS 22
CHALLENGES 22
OPTIONS 23
RISK & RESPONSE 24
EFFECTIVENESS 25
PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER **26**
STRATEGIC PILLAR #1 – WAY OF LIFE 28
STRATEGIC PILLAR #2 – COMMUNICATION & ENGAGEMENT 30
STRATEGIC PILLAR #3 – HEALTHCARE 32
STRATEGIC PILLAR #4 – INFRASTRUCTURE 40
STRATEGIC PILLAR #5 – DIVERSITY 42
STRATEGIC PILLAR #6 – ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT 44

MESSAGE FROM MAYOR & COUNCIL

As your Mayor and Council, we are deeply committed to ensuring that our town remains a place where everyone feels heard, valued, and proud to call home. It is with this commitment in mind that we present our new Strategic Plan – a roadmap designed with your needs and aspirations at its heart.

Our Strategic Plan focuses on what the community wants, ensuring that we address current needs while preparing for future growth. This means scheduling and conducting regular maintenance, such as road repairs, to keep our town running smoothly and safely. Our goal is to be proactive, tackling issues now so we are ready for the exciting growth ahead.

We recognize the immense opportunities on our horizon, but we also cherish our small-town community feel. Balancing these big opportunities with our unique charm is a priority. This plan has been crafted with input from the whole community, reflecting a diverse range of voices and perspectives. It is, essentially, a collective vision for our future.

As we implement this plan, we are hitting the reset button to refocus our efforts and ensure we are on the right track. It is a living document, open to adjustments as we learn and grow together. This flexibility allows us to adapt to new challenges and opportunities, ensuring we remain aligned with your needs.

Accountability is a cornerstone of our approach. We are committed to providing an Annual Strategic Plan Progress Report to update you and demonstrate our dedication to transparency and responsibility.

Thank you for your continued support and engagement. Together, we are building a bright, prosperous future for our town, grounded in the values and spirit that make Cochrane "Wonderfully Unexpected".

Warm regards,

MAYOR
PETER POLITIS

COUNCIL
MEMBERS

SYLVIE CHARRON-LEMIEUX

RODNEY HOOGENHOUD

DANIEL BRUNET

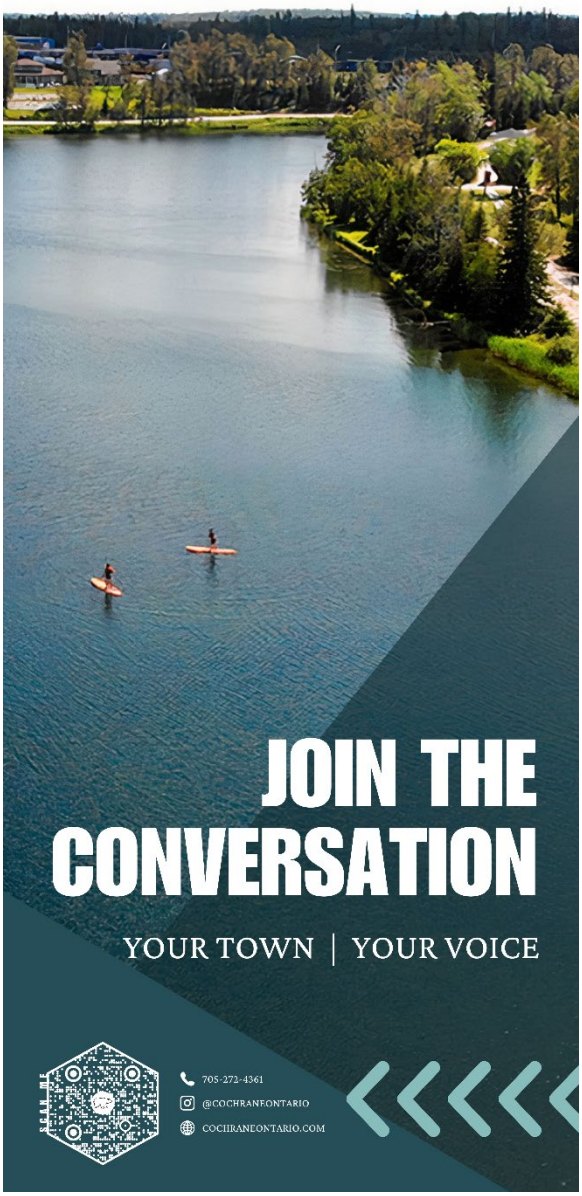
SUSAN NELSON

FRANCE BOUVIER

MARCK RECOSKIE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Strategic planning is **not** about compiling statistics, which are typically found in documents like the CIP, the Growth Plan, and the Official Plan. Instead, these statistical reports served to inform the development of this plan while incorporating insights from past strategies and reports, utilizing comparable data from geographically similar-sized municipalities (national in scope), and embracing the community as key stakeholders.



The goal of the planning process was to develop a sustainable and long-term plan that remains relevant and effective beyond the typical four-year council election cycle. This approach ensures continuity and stability in community development, reflecting the community's strong preference for a consistent vision rather than frequent changes with each new council. By prioritizing a robust and adaptable strategy, the plan aims to meet the evolving needs of the community while maintaining its core objectives and values.

To genuinely reflect the essence of our municipality, we placed paramount importance on community engagement, prioritizing it far above traditional statistical analysis. This intentional choice underscores our commitment to grounding the strategic plan in the lived experiences and insights of our residents.

The community engagement strategy was deliberately innovative, moving away from conventional public consultation methods to ensure broad and meaningful participation from diverse community segments. We employed a variety of engagement techniques, including interactive open houses, first impressions community analysis, walking tours and a 24-hours in the downtown review, as well as online and print “join the conversation” marketing and direct outreach (stakeholder interviews). This approach ensured diverse voices were heard, fostering a sense of ownership and alignment with the strategic plan. The feedback obtained was invaluable, identifying common ground and providing a nuanced understanding of community needs and priorities that statistical data alone cannot capture.

The economic development component is integral to this strategic plan and is not an isolated endeavour but an integral part of our broader strategic goals, aiming to foster a thriving local economy. Economic development drives job creation, enhances local revenue, improves the Way of Life for residents, and ensures long-term sustainability and resilience, enabling the community to thrive and adapt to future challenges.

Economic development in our strategic plan is embedded within each initiative, making it a continuous thread that runs through our strategic priorities. Whether we are focusing on improving primary care services, investing in infrastructure, or celebrating our cultural heritage, each action inherently supports economic growth by creating jobs, attracting investment, and fostering a vibrant, resilient local economy. This holistic approach ensures that all efforts are aligned with improving socio-economic outcomes, making our community a better and Wonderfully Unexpected place to live, work, and thrive.

Furthermore, while the strategic initiatives contribute to economic development, we also recognize the importance of larger, dedicated economic development projects. These are defined under their own strategic pillar, highlighting their significance and ensuring focused efforts. However, even these larger projects are intricately linked to the town's socio-economic status, ensuring that they not only drive economic growth but also enhance the overall well-being of our residents. By integrating economic development with our strategic objectives, we create a cohesive, sustainable strategy that benefits the entire community. Economic development initiatives include tourism, attracting new business, creating a 'niche' downtown, celebrating diversity, as well as critical investments in infrastructure, transportation, post-secondary education, and promoting the very assets that make Cochrane "Wonderfully Unexpected".

The planning process was structured into three (3) distinct phases, each comprising several critical components.

PHASE 1

1. **Visioning** – research into the history, current state, and past strategies where a compelling vision that is realistic, credible, and inspiring emerged, setting the stage for long-term aspirations.

2. **Identification of Key Elements** – identified core elements of what makes the Town "wonderfully unexpected", addressing the needs of today while focusing on growth over a three- to ten-year timeframe.

3. **Environmental Scan** – an environmental scan was conducted to identify opportunities and emerging issues, using the SCOR^{2}E (Strengths, Challenges, Options, Risk, Response, and Effectiveness) analysis framework.

PHASE 2

1. **Key Issues & Opportunity Identification** – challenges and opportunities for responding were discussed comprehensively to inform the next steps.

2. **Identification of Strategic Priority Areas** – identified key areas critical to the community for sustainability and future success.

3. **Confirm Strategic Pillars** – through pre-work, community input, operational insight, and closed planning sessions, we identified commonality between the community and Council leading to six strategic pillars from which to build from.

PHASE 3

1. **Tactical Planning** – for each strategic pillar, we developed specific tactical actions for the immediate, short-term, mid-term, and long-term implementation, prioritized based on recurring themes and insights that consistently surfaced throughout the comprehensive engagement process.

2. Implementation Considerations – we addressed timing, resource needs, and provided planning resources to support implementation.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, both social and economic factors significantly influence the longevity and Way of Life in our community. Access to education, stable employment, quality healthcare, and safe, affordable housing are fundamental elements that shape our well-being. By ensuring these opportunities are accessible to all residents, we create an environment where everyone has the chance to thrive.

The Strategic Plan and Economic Development component prioritizes these aspects, recognizing that social and economic opportunities are crucial for living longer, healthier lives, and represents a collaborative, community-driven effort to chart a sustainable and prosperous future for everyone.

Through strategic investments in healthcare, infrastructure, education, and local business we aim to remove barriers and provide the resources necessary for every individual to reach their full potential while creating an environment that fosters innovation, and Wonderfully Unexpected opportunities.

Economic development is a cornerstone of creating these Wonderfully Unexpected opportunities. By fostering a robust local economy, we offer a higher standard of living. This, in turn, leads to improved health outcomes and greater overall well-being. Larger economic development projects, defined under their own strategic pillar, are crucial in this regard, as they directly contribute to the town's socio-economic status. These projects are not stand-alone; they are part of a comprehensive strategy to

enhance the Way of Life in our community. By integrating economic development with social initiatives, we ensure a holistic approach that supports the long-term health and prosperity of our residents.

Our commitment to environmental stewardship ensures that our development is sustainable, preserving our natural resources for future generations. And furthermore, this plan underscores the importance of diversity and inclusivity, ensuring that all voices are heard and valued in our decision-making processes. By leveraging the strengths and talents of our residents, we are building a resilient and adaptable community capable of thriving in an ever-changing economic landscape.

Ultimately, the Strategic Plan and Economic Development component is not just a roadmap for this term, but rather a comprehensive vision for our collective future. It is deeply rooted in the collective feedback and shared vision of the community and embodies our shared goals and ambitions, paving the way for our Town where everyone can flourish. Together, we are creating a legacy of prosperity, sustainability, and community spirit that will endure for generations to come.

" Le bonheur, c'est d'avoir une vie qu'on peut regarder sans regret. "

" Happiness is having a life that you can look back on without regret."

Gabrielle Roy, Canadian Francophone Author

CONTEXT & METHODOLOGY

During the project kick-off meeting, the project charter was established, and the Town's project team explained that this work was being undertaken as a significant step to ensure continued progress towards a positive future for residents. The project charter also highlighted the potential for minor delays in confirming statistical data due to a growth study being conducted by an outside firm not yet completed.

WHAT IS STRATEGIC PLANNING

Strategic planning is driven by growth, is long-term, and is change-orientated. The process is a methodical one that municipalities use to define direction and make informed decisions on allocating resources to pursue this direction. It involves setting long-term goals, identifying necessary actions to achieve these goals, and establishing metrics to track progress. Strategic planning is **not** about compiling statistics, which are typically found in documents like the CIP, the Growth Plan, and the Official Plan; instead, these statistical reports serve to inform the strategic plan.

Incorporating elements of **Economic Development** into strategic planning is crucial because it ensures that the municipality not only meets its administrative and infrastructural needs but also fosters a thriving economy. Economic development initiatives can attract businesses, create jobs, increase the tax base, and enhance the way of life for residents. By aligning economic development with strategic planning, municipalities can build sustainable communities that are resilient to economic shifts, changes in leadership, and better positioned for future growth.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

- Positions the Municipality to manage and control its future.
- Ensures the Town does the "right things, at the right time, in the right way".
- Unites the community and focuses energy on the important goals.
- Increases accountability through the focus on achieving results.

Note: Council and Community alike, through all engagements and planning sessions, were united in their desire to have a plan that does not change every four years.

"In our every deliberation, we must consider the impact of our decisions on the next seven generations."

- Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) philosophy

CONSIDERATIONS FOR PLANNING

Municipalities operate within the constraints of limited resources, time, and change, making it essential to focus on a few critical priorities. The objective of the municipal strategic planning process is to comprehensively address critical questions that ground the work:

- Can the municipality provide the necessary services for today and accommodate future growth?
- Does the community trust that council and town leadership will act in the best interests of the town?
- Is the municipality capable of meeting its administrative responsibilities, delivering essential services, and complying with legislative requirements?
- Can the municipality offer these vital services to residents at an affordable cost?

By maintaining this grounded focus, municipalities can effectively advance and sustain the critical strategies beyond the four-year election cycle, ensuring effective governance while building community trust and satisfaction through the implementation of important, though less critical, strategies.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR THE PROJECT

At the start of the project, the consulting team, along with the Town's project team, agreed that all efforts made in this project must keep in mind the following:

- That meaningful and extensive collaboration with community stakeholders is imperative.
- That Indigenous collaboration and participation are indispensable for this project, as they bring forth unique perspectives, insights, and future considerations for partnership, investment, and diversity.
- That engagements must represent and respect the unique diversity of the community, including Anglophone, Francophone, Indigenous, and newcomers to Canada.
- That planning sessions are most authentic in-person vs. virtual.
- To create a safe and confidential environment where all voices are heard, equal, and respected.
- To anticipate that this task will be challenging and to embrace complexity.

ENGAGEMENT METHODOLOGY

The community engagement methodology is grounded in the principles of inclusivity, transparency, and active participation. A diverse range of perspectives is essential to developing a comprehensive and effective strategic plan, and to achieve this, a multifaceted approach to community engagement utilizing a variety of methods designed to reach all segments of the community was prioritized over traditional public consultations. By leveraging print and digital marketing, focus groups, open houses, individualized stakeholder interviews intertwined with tactical analysis and desk research, this not only facilitated broad participation but also fostered a sense of ownership and collaboration among community members, laying a strong foundation for the successful implementation.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS COMMUNITY ANALYSIS

The First Impressions Community Analysis helps communities learn about existing strengths and areas for improvement as seen through the eyes of a first-time visitor(s) and is recommended as a **tactical action conducted bi-annually** through an inter-municipal community exchange.

Conducting this analysis is crucial for small and mid-size municipalities as part of their strategic planning and economic development efforts, especially when aiming to attract professionals to the area, expand commercial investment, and develop tourism as key economic drivers.

As the old saying goes, “you never get a second chance to make a first impression”. For first-time visitors, the way a community presents itself is of critical importance. The look and feel of the community experienced by a visitor will most likely influence how long they stay, if they will return, if they will move, and whether they will speak about the community positively or negatively.

Further, the analysis helps to pinpoint unique assets, such as natural attractions, cultural heritage, or local events, which can be marketed to attract tourists and new residents while also serving to highlight areas needing improvement, whether it’s infrastructure, services, or amenities, allowing the municipality to make informed decisions regarding finance and resource allocation. Insights from the analysis can also encourage local entrepreneurship and attract external investors.

A total of four (4) anonymous visitors were engaged to conduct the assessment. These individuals are not affiliated or directly familiar with the Town of Cochrane, enabling them to provide their unbiased impression of the community. The First Impressions Assessment© by each visitor follows a simple but subjective outline and includes:

- Signage and Wayfinding
- Walkability
- Streetscapes
- Local Amenities, Business Diversity, and Recreational Assets
- Ease of Finding Community Information and the Community's Online Presence (website)
- Key Attributes that Make a Lasting Impression

JOIN THE CONVERSATION

In today's digital age, it's easy to assume that everyone is plugged into social media and regularly checking online updates through the Town's website. However, this isn't always the case. Many community members may not be active on social media platforms or may be too busy to visit the town's website frequently.

To foster greater interest and reach a broader audience for participation in open houses and stakeholder interviews, the unified them and call to action, "Join the Conversation", was developed and marketed using a mix of both print and online strategies:

Print Media – traditional posters, banners, and flyers with a QR code were distributed at the Tim Horton Event Centre, the pavilion at Commando Lake, the post office, and the Board of Trade.

Online Platforms – simultaneously, the digital version of the above was marketed leveraging the Town's social media pages and the Town's website.

Combining print and online marketing made it possible for all segments of the community to be aware of and participate in strategic planning and economic development conversations regardless of their tech-savviness, online presence, or daily schedules. By using multiple touchpoints, the initiative was more visible and accessible for participation.

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

THE VALUE OF INDIVIDUAL STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

Individual stakeholder interviews are invaluable compared to large group, public engagements because they provide deeper, more nuanced perspectives. These one-on-one conversations allow stakeholders to express their views candidly, without the pressure of a public setting. This leads to more honest and detailed feedback, revealing insights that might be overlooked in a group environment. Moreover, individual interviews reach those who may feel uncomfortable speaking in front of others or are unable to attend public meetings due to scheduling conflicts.

The extra time and commitment dedicated to conducting individual stakeholder interviews have proven to be worthwhile. By emphasizing the importance of these interviews, more people felt encouraged to participate, knowing their voices would be heard in a private and respectful manner.

The "Join the Conversation" marketing campaign significantly contributed to this increased engagement, as it prompted numerous community members to reach out directly and request to schedule interviews. This proactive response highlights the community's eagerness to be involved and underscores the effectiveness of a comprehensive outreach strategy in fostering meaningful participation. A total of **sixty-four (64)** confidential stakeholder interviews were conducted.

DESK RESEARCH

The following desk research was conducted while awaiting the completion of the Growth Plan. This interim research phase allowed us to gather essential background information and insights to inform and support the strategic planning process.

1. **Current Economic Trends –** examined local, regional, and national economic data to understand broader economic patterns that may impact the municipality.

2. **Demographic Analysis –** analyzed population data, including age distribution, income levels, and population growth trends, to identify key demographic shifts.

3. **Tourism Potential** – investigated existing tourism attractions, visitor statistics, and potential areas for tourism development to identify opportunities for growth.

4. **Infrastructure & Services** – reviewed the current state of municipal infrastructure and services, identifying strengths and areas needing improvement.

5. **Benchmarking –** compared the municipality with similar towns to identify best practices and successful strategies that could be adapted locally.

This desk research provided a foundational understanding, setting the stage for more informed and effective strategic planning once the growth plan was available.

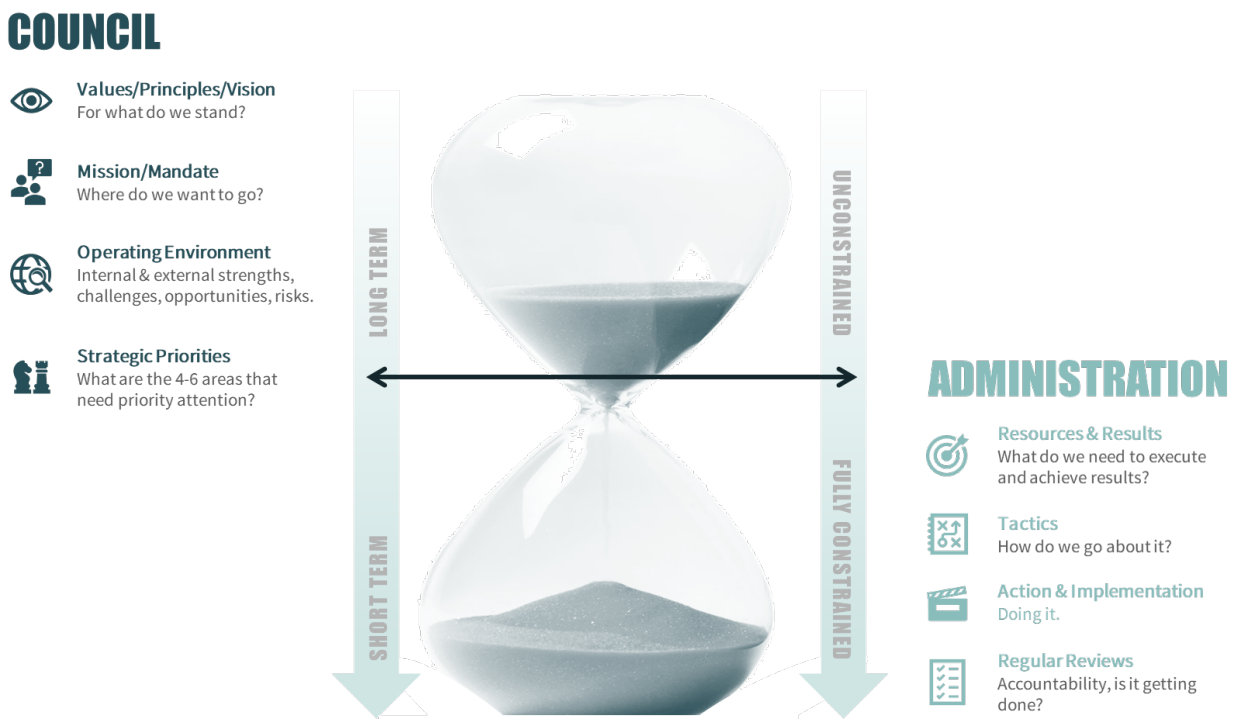
CLOSED SESSION PLANNING/ADMINISTRATION INSIGHT

A closed-session workshop with the Council was a crucial step in the strategic planning process. The setting provided a confidential environment where Council members were able to engage in candid discussions about the municipality's values, principles, and vision, which form the foundation of strategic planning and initiatives important to economic development.

Referring to the image below, the upper part of the hourglass represents the long-term, unconstrained planning led by the Council. Here, the focus is on defining core values, understanding the operating environment, and setting strategic priorities. These discussions determined where the municipality wants to go and what areas require priority attention.

The lower part of the hourglass shifts to the short-term, fully constrained execution handled by the Administration, led by the CAO. Resources and results are identified, tactics are developed, and actions are implemented. Regular reviews ensure accountability and track progress.

The closed-session workshops, one full day with Council and one ½ day with Administration, bridged these two segments, ensuring that strategic priorities set by the Council are realistic, actionable, and aligned with Administration's capacity to execute and achieve desired outcomes for the community.



PUBLIC OPEN HOUSE(S)

Two open houses and several coffee conversations were held to gather community input. These events allowed community members to share their opinions and ideas, fostering transparency and ensuring that their needs and preferences are considered in the planning process.

- Women's Event hosted at Railway Cafe
- Public Open House hosted at the Board of Trade Building
- Coffee Conversations – throughout the community, including home visits

WALKING TOUR & 24-HOURS IN THE DOWNTOWN

A "walking tour and 24 hours in the downtown" is an immersive approach used in municipal strategic planning to gain a comprehensive understanding of the downtown area's dynamics, opportunities, and challenges. This involved two key activities:

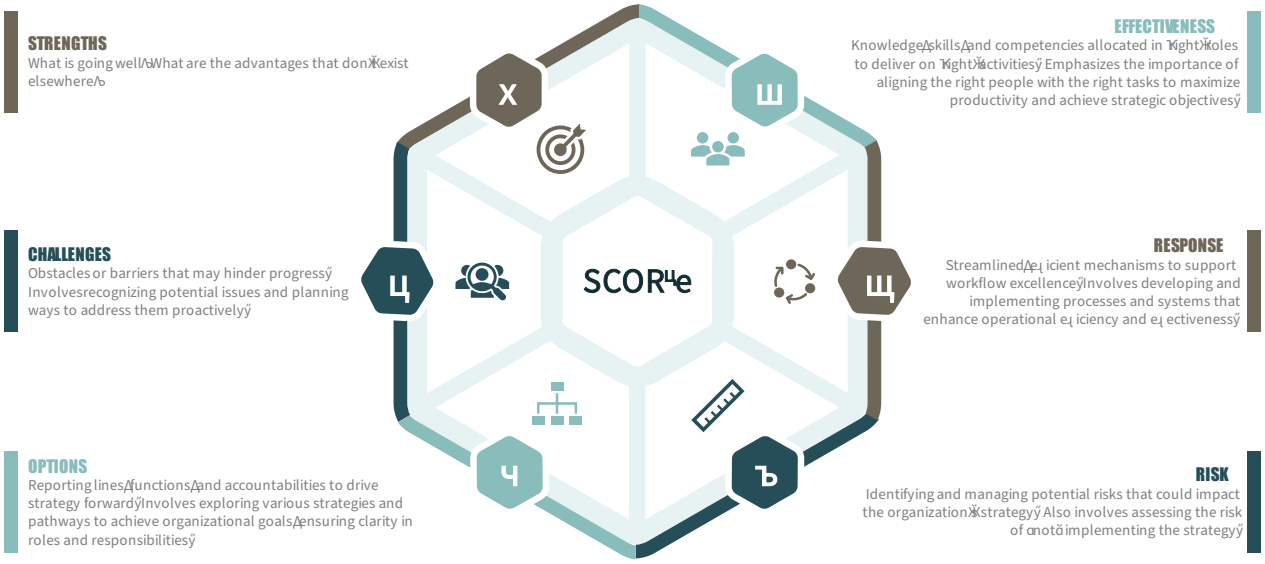
WALKING TOUR

Through the downtown area to observe the physical environment, infrastructure, and amenities including streetscapes, public spaces, storefronts, traffic flow, pedestrian accessibility, and aesthetic appeal.

24-HOURS IN THE DOWNTOWN

Monitoring the area throughout the day and night provided insight into safety and security by observing lighting, surveillance, and police presence helped to identify areas that may need enhancements to improve public perception of safety.

STRENGTHS, CHALLENGES, OPTIONS, RISK/RESPONSE, AND EFFECTIVENESS (SCOR²E)



The SCOR²E model offers a significantly more effective approach to strategic planning compared to the traditional SWOT analysis. While SWOT analysis focuses on identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, the SCOR²E model adopts a more positive and action-oriented perspective.

SCOR²E guides you through potential obstacles, encouraging you to generate proactive responses and solutions for them. This approach ensures that challenges are addressed constructively rather than merely identified. Unlike SWOT, where weaknesses and threats can overlap and create a discouragingly negative outlook, leading to inaction, the SCOR²E model emphasizes constructive problem-solving and forward movement.

By focusing on generating actionable responses to obstacles, SCOR²E helps maintain a positive momentum and encourages continuous progress. This shift from merely identifying issues to actively addressing them makes the SCOR²E model a more dynamic and effective tool for strategic planning, fostering a proactive mindset and facilitating tangible outcomes.

STRENGTHS

- Way of Life – throughout the community, people of every age spoke about the quality of life and the appreciation for community and a great place to raise a family
- Year-round Recreation – opportunities for tourism growth
- Primary & Secondary Education
- Diversity
- Polar Bear Habitat
- Diverse Job/Career Opportunities
- Economic Hub – gateway to James Bay, major transportation (ON Northland)
- Indigenous Investment Within the Community

CHALLENGES

- Complex Housing Needs – housing for professionals, affordable housing, seniors housing, homelessness
- Healthcare – extends beyond general practitioners and primary care
- Accessibility
- Financial & Labour Resources to Manage Growth
- Risk Management – wildfires, heavy transportation around Commando Lake
- Local Transportation and Wayfinding
- Community Misperception & Unrest – community engagement
- Emigration – of young adults seeking post-secondary education and professional career opportunities
- Downtown Area
- Essential Services Agreements

OPTIONS

Resourcing requirements and accountabilities involve innovative strategies and pathways to maintain the quality of life that exists and to execute the strategic plan, ensuring its sustainability during operational disruptions and beyond council terms. The Way of Life is the single most concern to everyone in the community, making it essential to prioritize and preserve it through thoughtful planning, communications, and resource allocation.

Innovative resourcing strategies to consider include:

- **Volunteer Program –** active participation and engagement from the community, including a volunteer recognition plan.

"Volunteering is the ultimate exercise in democracy. You vote in elections once, every four years, but when you volunteer, you vote everyday about the kind of community you want to live in."

- Anonymous

- Appointing a **Cultural Ambassador** to promote and celebrate local heritage, diversity, introduce new cultural engagement, and acknowledge Cochrane founding families.
- Designating an **Indigenous Liaison** to strengthen relationships and collaboration with Indigenous communities.
- Appointing a **Special Advisor** to Council – someone who is not from the town and remains unbiased to provide valuable insights and expert advice on areas of strategy, execution, change management, organizational design, and to support continuity, informing the next council and community to maintain progress without unnecessary changes.
- **Public-Private Partnerships (P3) –** collaborating with private businesses for infrastructure projects, community programs, or services to leverage private investment to enhance public resources.
- **Grant Writing & Funding –** outsourcing to a dedicated grant writer or firm, and/or establishing a grant committee to improve success rates in identifying and obtaining needed funds.
- **Leadership Evaluation –** formal evaluation of the effectiveness of current leadership in driving projects and initiatives. Consider the value of change.

These innovative ideas and approaches will help ensure that the community's quality of life remains a top priority, and that the strategic plan continues to move forward effectively.

RISK & RESPONSE

Risk and response involve identifying potential threats, including the risk of not taking action, to ensure proactive measures are in place. Completing a thorough risk assessment and implementing a risk register to track and measure risks are crucial steps. While it is impossible to include every minor risk for each challenge, we have pinpointed five key challenges for risk/response that align with our strategic pillars. Of importance is to maintain progress during operational disruptions, such as strikes or staff vacancies, requires adaptable strategies and contingency planning.

The risk to our Way of Life – climate change and wildfire risk pose significant threats to northern communities, including Cochrane. Cochrane is already a designated evacuation centre for more northern communities but is also within the geographical risk for wildfire. Without proper risk preparedness, the way of life will be severely impacted. Uncontrolled wildfires can lead to the destruction of homes, infrastructure, and natural resources, causing displacement and economic hardship. Additionally, poor air quality from smoke can lead to health problems, particularly for vulnerable populations such as children and the elderly. Preparing for these risks is essential to protect the well-being and stability of northern communities.

Major transportation is an Infrastructure risk for the town. Train derailments are a significant concern, particularly because the town is a major port for Ontario Northland, which is expanding. This expansion increases the potential for accidents, which can lead to severe disruptions and hazards. Additionally, there is a spill hazard risk from chemical, fuel, or other materials from heavy trucks passing around the lake. A spill could contaminate water sources, harm local wildlife, and pose serious health risks to residents. Effective risk management and preparedness strategies while waiting for the Ministry to complete work for alternate truck traffic routes are crucial to mitigate these threats and ensure the safety and security of the community. Additionally, the risk to infrastructure during any type of disruption is significant. Without an essential services agreement with the Town's unions, essential services are always at risk.

Economic Development in the town faces two key risks. First, this past winter demonstrated how climate change can negatively impact the tourism sector, making it clear that not adapting tourism management strategies poses a risk to growth. Second, if efforts are not made to clean up, beautify, and revitalize the downtown area, the Town will struggle to attract new businesses and entrepreneurs. This lack of appeal also affects the Town's ability to draw new residents, further hindering economic development.

The Way of Life in Town is significantly impacted by accessibility, or the lack thereof. Accessibility refers to products, services, or environments for people with disabilities. The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) is legislation that mandates standards for accessibility in five key areas: customer service, employment, information and communications, transportation, and public spaces. The town must further develop, implement, and enforce these standards related to public spaces

(indoor and outdoor), services, accommodation, employment, and buildings by January 1, 2025. This legislation applies to every person in both the public and private sectors, ensuring that everyone, regardless of ability, can fully participate in community life. Improving accessibility is essential for enhancing the way of life for all residents and promoting inclusivity and equal opportunity.

Communication & Engagement – The current elevated risk of community unrest and misperceptions can be greatly mitigated by implementing a comprehensive communications and engagement plan. A critical component of this plan is redeveloping the Town website, which is currently difficult to navigate. The website is often the first point of contact for individuals wanting to learn more about Cochrane and why it is wonderfully unexpected, but the current user experience leaves a poor first impression, which further impacts newcomer/new business attraction. Enhancing the website's functionality and design will improve initial perceptions and facilitate better communication. Effective communications also play a vital role in reducing misunderstandings during disruptions to services, ensuring residents are well-informed and reassured. By prioritizing clear and accessible communication, the town can foster a more informed and engaged community.

EFFECTIVENESS

The considerable work that lies ahead will only be effective if Council, Administration, community, decision-makers, local businesses/organizations, and residents are all willing to make a genuine commitment and embrace change. Each plays a crucial role in contributing to the functioning and future progress of the town. Strategic plans and future economic progress can only be effective with the active and sustained involvement of all these stakeholders, ensuring that every voice is heard, and every effort is aligned towards common goals.

The recently completed Organizational Review can help define and assess current skill sets and identify gaps, ensuring that Town Administration has the right people in the right roles with the right skill set. Steering committees, with community representation, can provide guidance and oversight to ensure that options are viable to the community and aligned with organizational goals. Consistent reporting and KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) are critical for accountability and in evaluating the effectiveness of different options and making informed decisions based on data-driven insights.

PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Municipalities operate in a resource-constrained and time-constrained environment, making strategic planning effective only when it focuses on a select few critical priorities. Every deviation from this focus hampers the ability to make progress.

Throughout all the engagements with community and the supporting planning sessions, common themes consistently emerged. These themes led to the identification of the following six Strategic pillars as the essential priorities. These priorities address our current situation, outline the necessary steps to achieve our future goals, and ensure consistent progress beyond every council term.

Strategic priorities only need to be revised or completely re-done every 10-15 years. However, annual review is necessary as prioritization may shift, and/or new initiatives and actions may be introduced in response to legislative changes or unforeseen events such as pandemics or wildfires, but the core priorities should remain intact.

An annual Strategic Priority Report to the community is crucial for maintaining transparency and ensuring that the community remains informed and engaged. This continuous engagement is imperative for the acceptance of any adjustments or changes. When the community is well-informed, they are more likely to understand and support necessary adjustments, fostering a sense of shared responsibility and purpose. This approach not only strengthens community ties but also enhances the resilience of the overall strategic plan, maintaining a consistent long-term strategy that does not change with each four-year council term allowing for sustained progress and avoiding the disruption that can come from frequent shifts in direction.

TACTICAL PLANNING

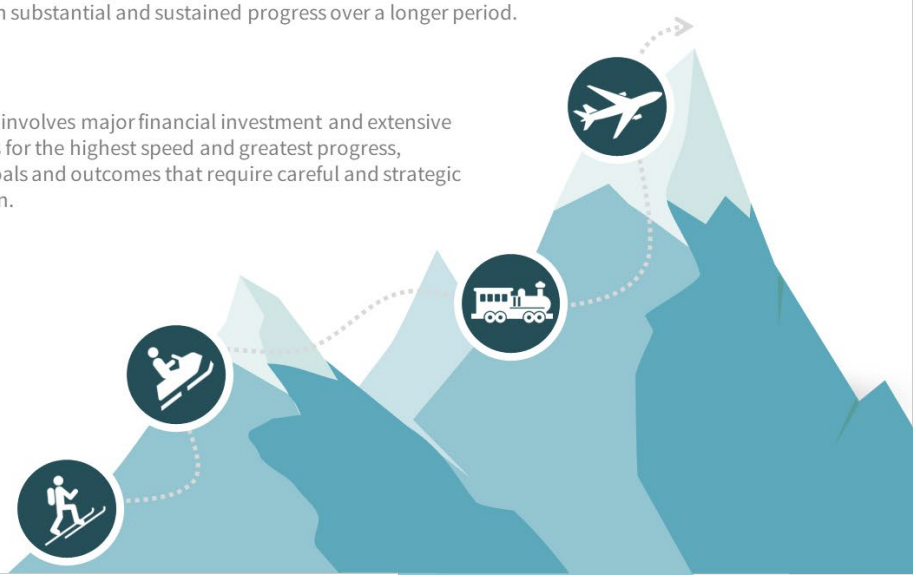
Each of the six strategic pillars are designed to address specific areas of focus. These pillars are supported by 24 key initiatives, prioritized on time frame, resource needs, and legislative requirements. These key initiatives are defined as: **immediate** (3-12 months), **short-term** (1-3 years), **mid-term** (3-7 years), and **long-term** (7-10 years), ensuring a broad and comprehensive approach. Furthermore, each initiative is broken down into tactical actions, amounting to a total of 65 tactical actions. These tactical actions are critical for operationalizing the strategic plan, ensuring that every step taken is deliberate, measurable, and contributes to the overall goals of economic growth and sustainability.

IMMEDIATE
Immediate action that requires minimal to no financial investment and minimal people resources. It gets you moving quickly, though not at a fast pace, and requires little energy to make progress.

SHORT-TERM
Short-term action that involves moderate financial investment and a moderate number of people resources. It enables faster movement and more substantial progress compared to immediate actions, but still within a relatively short time frame.

MID-TERM
Mid-term initiatives that require planning committees, significant financial investment, and a considerable number of people resources. These initiatives move at a steady and reliable pace, focusing on substantial and sustained progress over a longer period.

LONG-TERM
Long-term planning that involves major financial investment and extensive people resources. It aims for the highest speed and greatest progress, focusing on long-term goals and outcomes that require careful and strategic planning and preparation.



WAY OF LIFE

STRATEGIC PILLAR #1

Way of Life in Cochrane fosters a deep sense of pride and passion among residents, driving their commitment to preserving and enhancing the unique character and well-being of the town.

Way of Life is the essence and core that unifies all other strategic initiatives and economic planning, serving as the foundation that makes our community unique and vibrant. It encompasses everything from healthcare and infrastructure to parks, recreation, and education, ensuring that every resident, of every age, can enjoy a fulfilling and balanced life.

When considering the way of life in our community, it's imperative to ensure inclusivity and accessibility for all residents, including newcomers to Canada and those living with disabilities. Creating an environment where everyone feels welcome, supported, and empowered to participate fully in community life involves improving accessibility, increasing capacity for cultural diversity, expanding welcome services for newcomers, and implementing inclusive recreational and educational programs that cater to diverse needs and abilities. By prioritizing inclusivity alongside physical and service improvements, we create a truly vibrant and equitable community where every individual can thrive.

In addition, enhancing the accessibility of our parks and public spaces is crucial. Investing in features such as accessible pathways, sensory-friendly areas, and adaptive equipment allows all residents to enjoy and benefit from our natural environments and promote healthy living and strengthen community bonds; community spaces that are welcoming and usable for everyone not only improves physical health but also fosters a sense of connection, enhancing our Way of Life.

I love our way of life and the backyard we get to live in. The amount of greenspace we have for recreation is fantastic!

PETER POLITIS, MAYOR

WAY OF LIFE

Initiatives and tactical actions are categorized into the immediate (3 to 12 months), short-term (1 to 3 years), mid-term (3 to7 years), and long-term (7 to 10 years) and rated by risk. **These initiatives aim to enhance community well-being, cultural enrichment, and sustainable living practices.**

IMMEDIATE
within the next 3 to 12 months

- Review AODA compliance legislation and request extension to avoid penalties
- Update AODA Plan, include accessible pathways around parks and lakes ***Age-Friendly Community*
- Implement an Adopt a Park program for local organizations and individuals to volunteer twice per year (spring/fall) for cleanup to maintain beautification

SHORT-TERM
within the next 1 to 3 years

- Establish Accessibility Committee and supporting budget to execute AODA compliance
- Access funding to rename core streets after founding families of Cochrane
- Develop Newcomer Welcome Package

MID-TERM
within the next 3 to 7 years

- Wayfinding and Streetscape Signage Plan
- New AG Days Festival
- Establish one Social Support Services Agency – merger of existing agencies
- **Designation as "Age-Friendly Community"

LONG-TERM
within the next 7 to 10 years

- Water Conservation Plan
- Green Architecture Plan (manufacturing)

RED
High priority, greatest opportunity for positive impact or must be done due to legislative requirements, high cost involved, possible need for P3 resourcing, long-term impact

YELLOW
Minimal cost, minimal resources, positive impact

BLUE
Higher cost, higher resources, long-term impact

GREEN
No cost, easy to execute, positive impact

COMMUNICATION & ENGAGEMENT

STRATEGIC PILLAR #2

Effective communication and active engagement with our community stand at the forefront of our strategic priorities for the municipal plan. We recognize that fostering meaningful connections and ensuring that every resident feels informed and involved are essential for the success and well-being of our community. While digital platforms and social media offer powerful tools for outreach, we are acutely aware that not everyone is online or active on these platforms. Therefore, our approach will be inclusive and multifaceted, utilizing traditional methods alongside modern technologies to reach every member of our community.

Engagement goes beyond simply keeping residents informed; it involves empowering the community to actively participate and contribute to our collective well-being. One of the most impactful ways this can be achieved is through volunteering. We believe that encouraging volunteerism strengthens community bonds, promotes a sense of ownership, and enhances the quality of life for everyone. By providing diverse opportunities for residents to volunteer, whether through local events, environmental initiatives, or support services, we aim to harness the talents and passions of our community members.

Combining digital communications with town hall meetings, newsletters, community boards, direct mail, and volunteer programs, we aspire to create an environment where all voices are heard, and every resident has the opportunity to engage, contribute, and help shape the future of our community. Together, we can build a more connected, vibrant, and resilient community for all.

I cherish the tight-knit community that rushes to the aid of its residents without reservation, our spirit of unity, and everyone's passion to support the town.

DANIEL BRUNET, COUNCILLOR

COMMUNICATION & ENGAGEMENT

Initiatives and tactical actions are categorized into the immediate (3 to 12 months), short-term (1 to 3 years), mid-term (3 to7 years), and long-term (7 to 10 years) and rated by risk. **These initiatives aim to enhance effective communication and participation from the community.**

IMMEDIATE
within the next 3 to 12 months

- Redevelop the Town website to enhance user-friendliness and improve search functionality, ensuring residents can easily find the information they need
- Introduce monthly Coffee with a Councillor in partnership with community organizations
- Launch a quarterly Community Newsletter that highlights local events, updates from town officials, and opportunities for resident involvement

SHORT-TERM
within the next 1 to 3 years

- Implement Annual Strategic Plan Report Card to update residents on progress
- Launch a comprehensive Volunteer Program that connects residents with meaningful opportunities to contribute to community projects and services
- Hire a communications coordinator to manage and align communications across the Town's website, Let's Chat Cochrane, and all social media, ensuring all sites are interconnected for easy navigation and access

MID-TERM
within the next 3 to 7 years

- Establish a Community Engagement and Outreach Program and implement a dedicated Community Engagement Team

LONG-TERM
within the next 7 to 10 years

- Smart City Infrastructure Development – including advanced communication systems, public Wi-Fi, smart traffic management, and environmental monitoring

RED
High priority, greatest opportunity for positive impact or must be done due to legislative requirements, high cost involved, possible need for P3 resourcing, long-term impact

YELLOW
Minimal cost, minimal resources, positive impact

BLUE
Higher cost, higher resources, long-term impact

GREEN
No cost, easy to execute, positive impact

STRATEGIC PILLAR #3

Addressing healthcare requires a comprehensive approach that not only tackles the critical issue of doctor shortages but also encompasses Aging in Place, Critical Care, and Social Support Services. By focusing on these key areas, we aim to ensure that all residents, especially our aging population, have access to the necessary medical support and social services to lead healthy, fulfilling lives. Our plan includes initiatives to attract and retain healthcare professionals, expand critical care facilities, and provide robust social support networks, ensuring that no one is left without the care they need.

In addition, our strategic plan recognizes the importance of secondary healthcare services such as chiropractic care, dentistry, optometry, and even veterinary care. These services are essential for maintaining community well-being and our way of life. Ensuring easy access to these services helps prevent minor health issues from becoming major ones, supports the overall health of our residents, and extends our commitment to the well-being of our beloved pets.

My passion lies in our community's strength and well-being. Together, we can create a healthier, more supportive environment where everyone thrives.

SUSAN NELSON, COUNCILLOR

Of equal importance is addressing anti-racism and anti-oppression in our healthcare services. This is an uncomfortable yet essential step we must take to ensure our commitment to diversity extends beyond welcoming gestures and cultural celebrations. It is crucial that every person in Cochrane accessing healthcare feels safe, respected, and free from oppression. By integrating these commitments into our healthcare strategy, we create a holistic health ecosystem that supports every aspect of our residents' lives, reinforcing our commitment to their physical, mental, and emotional well-being.

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HEALTHCARE

Initiatives and tactical actions are categorized into the immediate (3 to 12 months), short-term (1 to 3 years), mid-term (3 to7 years), and long-term (7 to 10 years) and rated by risk. **These initiatives aim to address Primary Care, Critical Care, Aging in Place, and Community Social Services needs.**

PRIMARY CARE

IMMEDIATE
within the next 3 to 12 months

- Continuing Efforts to Recruit Healthcare Professionals – create incentives to attract primary care physicians, nurse practitioners, and other healthcare professionals such as chiropractors, dentists, veterinarians, and optometrists
- Health Education Campaign – through the Wellbeing Committee, launch a campaign to educate the community on preventative care and healthy living

SHORT-TERM
within the next 1 to 3 years

- Digital Health Education Campaign – expand to adopt a digital health education platform accessed through the town website to include downloadable resources such as specific health topics, recorded webinars, and self-directed "healthy living" e-learning modules
- Expand Telehealth Services

MID-TERM
within the next 3 to 7 years

- Research the feasibility of mobile health clinics to provide primary care services
- Healthcare Workforce Pipeline – develop partnerships with medical schools for local post-secondary programming for local graduates as well as create residency programs in town to attract and retain new medical graduates

LONG-TERM
within the next 7 to 10 years

- Development of a comprehensive health and wellness ecosystem that includes fitness centers, wellness programs, and community gardens to promote overall community health and wellbeing

RED
High priority, greatest opportunity for positive impact or must be done due to legislative requirements, high cost involved, possible need for P3 resourcing, long-term impact

YELLOW
Minimal cost, minimal resources, positive impact

BLUE
Higher cost, higher resources, long-term impact

GREEN
No cost, easy to execute, positive impact

CRITICAL CARE

IMMEDIATE
within the next 3 to 12 months

- Conduct a feasibility study on the effectiveness of Community Paramedicine to reduce emergency room backlog and wait times
- Develop a Comprehensive Anti-Racism/Anti-Oppression in Healthcare Framework in partnership with M.I.C.s Group of Health Services, Cochrane Family Health, Sweetgrass Heath Centre and Porcupine Health Unit

SHORT-TERM
within the next 1 to 3 years

- Develop Community Paramedicine Program and Services in partnership with M.I.C.s Group of Health Services and Porcupine Health Unit
- Staff Retention – create leadership development programs aimed at preparing entry-level, intermediate, and non-management staff for leadership roles within the hospital

MID-TERM
within the next 3 to 7 years

- Hospital Infrastructure Asset Management Plan – ensure that the hospital's infrastructure is continuously evaluated and upgraded to meet current and future healthcare needs
- Critical Care Transport Systems – develop and implement systems for rapid transport to specialty, non-local critical care hospitals

LONG-TERM
within the next 7 to 10 years

- Tele-ICU services to provide remote critical care support from larger hospitals
- Public-Private Partnership (P3) for State-of-the-Art Cardiac Care and Heart Health Clinic

RED
High priority, greatest opportunity for positive impact or must be done due to legislative requirements, high cost involved, possible need for P3 resourcing, long-term impact

YELLOW
Minimal cost, minimal resources, positive impact

BLUE
Higher cost, higher resources, long-term impact

GREEN
No cost, easy to execute, positive impact

COMMUNITY SOCIAL SUPPORT SERVICES

SHORT-TERM
within the next 1 to 3 years

- Establish Coordinated Care Committee – responsibilities aimed at improving accessibility to and streamlined efficiency of community support services including community outreach to connect residents with social services and resources
- Conduct a Community Health Needs Assessment aimed to identify non-primary and non-critical healthcare needs

MID-TERM
within the next 3 to 7 years

- Implementation of Canada's Reaching Home and Housing First Strategy – housing instability and homelessness
- In partnership with the Canadian Red Cross, amalgamate independent community support service organizations/associations into a single entity

RED
High priority, greatest opportunity for positive impact or must be done due to legislative requirements, high cost involved, possible need for P3 resourcing, long-term impact

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GREEN
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AGING IN PLACE

The Aging in Place initiative is a comprehensive approach to supporting senior citizens to live independently and safely in their own homes for as long as possible. This initiative supports our commitment to becoming designated as an "Age-Friendly Community" and recognizes the preferences of many older adults to remain in familiar surroundings rather than moving to long-term care facilities and further supports to mitigate the challenges with long wait times for availability within long-term care facilities. Key components that aim to enhance the Way of Life for seniors by providing the necessary services, infrastructure, and support include:

1. **Home & Community Support Services**

   - In-Home Care – provision of medical and personal care services at home, including nursing care, physical therapy, and assistance with daily living activities.
   - Home Modifications – financial assistance and programs to make homes more accessible and safer, such as installing ramps, grab bars, and stairlifts.

2. **Healthcare Access**

   - Telehealth Services – expansion of telehealth services to allow seniors to access medical consultations and follow-up appointments from home; includes digital literacy to help seniors learn to utilize telehealth services
   - Community Health Workers – deployment of community health workers to provide regular check-ins, health education, and coordination of care.

3. **Transportation Services**

   - Senior-Friendly Transportation – development of transportation services that cater specifically to the needs of seniors, ensuring they can access medical appointments, social activities, and essential services.

4. **Social & Community Engagement**

   - Senior Centers and Programs – continued support of our senior centers and community programs for social, recreational, and educational activities.
   - Intergenerational Programs – initiatives that foster interaction between seniors and younger generations through mentorship programs, community projects, and shared living arrangements.

5. Technology & Innovation

» Smart Home Technology – promotion and subsidization of smart home devices that enhance safety and convenience, such as medical alert systems, home monitoring systems, and automated home devices.
» Digital Literacy Programs – training programs to help seniors learn to use new technologies effectively and safely.

6. Funding Advocacy

» Government Support – grant and funding application submissions that support aging in place, including affordable housing, healthcare services, and community-based programs.

Recruitment to Support Aging in Place requires the development of targeted recruitment campaigns and partnerships with local employment agencies, community organizations, and educational institutions to identify and recruit potential candidates from within the community.

Training to Support Aging in Place involves local post-secondary education in the areas of gerontology, home care, and community health. Partnering with medical schools offers opportunities for local residents seeking a second career and recent graduates to receive training and begin working immediately in the community. Additionally, providing scholarships or financial incentives for those who commit to working in the community after completing their studies, serves as a retention strategy.

Further considerations include:

- Internships & Practicums – internship and practicum opportunities with local healthcare providers and community organizations to gain hands-on experience in the field of aging in place.
- Mentorship Programs – mentorship programs where experienced healthcare professionals guide and support recent graduates as they transition into their roles; helps to build a supportive professional network and encourages retention.
- Continuing Education – continuing education and professional development opportunities to remain up-to-date with the latest best practices in Aging in Place.

Goals of the Aging in Place Initiative:

- **Enhance Way of Life –** improve the overall well-being of seniors by enabling them to live independently with dignity and comfort.
- **Reduce Healthcare Costs –** lower the demand for institutional care and reduce healthcare costs by promoting preventative care and community-based services.
- **Strengthen Communities –** build stronger, more inclusive communities by fostering connections between seniors and other community members.
- **Promote Healthy Aging –** encourage healthy lifestyles and preventative measures to maintain physical and mental health among seniors.

The success of the Aging in Place initiative relies on collaboration among various stakeholders, including government, healthcare providers, community organizations, educational institutions, and private sector partners. By working together, we can create a supportive environment that meets the diverse needs of seniors and allow them to have access to the resources they need to live safe, fulfilling, and independent lives in their own homes and community.

INFRASTRUCTURE

STRATEGIC PILLAR #4

Roads – we know, we listened, and we prioritized; the whole community has ranked fixing roads as the number one priority for infrastructure improvements.

Infrastructure is the backbone of our community, and effective asset management is crucial to keep our way of life flourishing. Ensuring that our community spaces are well-maintained and do not deteriorate is a top priority. By proactively managing our assets, we preserve the vitality of our parks, community centers, and public facilities, making sure they remain safe, inviting, and functional for all residents to enjoy.

Our strategic plan emphasizes a balanced approach to prioritizing infrastructure, focusing on both social and economic needs. Under social infrastructure, we prioritize emergency services (i.e., fire and police), housing, hospitals and healthcare, social services, schools, parks, community spaces, and the Polar Bear Habitat. These elements are essential for the safety, health, and well-being of our residents, providing the necessary support and services to foster a strong and resilient community.

Equally important is our commitment to economic infrastructure, including roads, water and wastewater systems, major transportation, telecommunications, and power. These foundational elements are critical for supporting economic growth, ensuring efficient connectivity, and providing reliable services that our residents and businesses depend on daily.

By taking a comprehensive approach to infrastructure and asset management, we aim to create a sustainable and thriving environment where all community members can live, work, and play with confidence and pride.

I cherish the small-town atmosphere and the community involvement with our diverse population. With gradual growth and a focus on maintaining our infrastructure, we can reap the benefits of being a larger centre while keeping our small-town feel.

MARCK RECOSKIE, COUNCILLOR

INFRASTRUCTURE

Initiatives and tactical actions are categorized into the immediate (3 to 12 months), short-term (1 to 3 years), mid-term (3 to7 years), and long-term (7 to 10 years) and rated by risk. **These initiatives aim to improve infrastructure that supports growth while also addressing future needs for the town's long-term prosperity and well-being.**

IMMEDIATE
within the next 3 to 12 months

- Review Asset Management Plan Actions and Tasks – adjust timelines where required
- Implement an Annual Road Maintenance Program – schedule and perform regular inspections, repairs, and resurfacing of roads, including a published timetable for the community to stay informed about upcoming works and potential disruptions
- Polar Bear Habitat – reclassify as a core municipal asset and develop an independent asset management plan including energy efficiency measures, risk management strategies to ensure the safety and well-being of the animals, and regular maintenance schedules to uphold the integrity and sustainability of the habitat

SHORT-TERM
within the next 1 to 3 years

- Identify financial strategies to deliver service and address funding shortfalls
- Update asset lifecycles and risk models for core and non-core municipal assets
- Development of a comprehensive Risk Management & Emergency Preparedness Plan
- Professional transitional housing investment/ purchase to attract and retain professionals like doctors and teachers

MID-TERM
within the next 3 to 7 years

- Develop an Energy Management Plan for core and non-core municipal assets
- Develop a Watershed Management and Conversation Plan

LONG-TERM
within the next 7 to 10 years

- Ministry of Transportation – development and construction of a ring road around the edge of town for heavy truck/equipment traffic elimination around Commando Lake

RED
High priority, greatest opportunity for positive impact or must be done due to legislative requirements, high cost involved, possible need for P3 resourcing, long-term impact

YELLOW
Minimal cost, minimal resources, positive impact

BLUE
Higher cost, higher resources, long-term impact

GREEN
No cost, easy to execute, positive impact

STRATEGIC PILLAR #5

One of the key strategic priorities is to celebrate and strengthen the rich diversity that defines our Town. We are proud of our vibrant Anglophone and Francophone heritage, which forms the foundation of our community's cultural tapestry. Equally, we honor and cherish the significant Indigenous population whose traditions and history are integral to our Town's identity. We also warmly welcome the growing number of newcomers to Canada who bring fresh perspectives and contribute to the dynamic and evolving character of our community.

Our commitment to diversity means fostering an inclusive environment where all cultural backgrounds are respected, and everyone has the opportunity to thrive. This involves implementing programs and initiatives that support cultural exchange, encourage understanding, and promote unity among our diverse population sectors. By embracing these unique contributions, we enhance the social, economic, and cultural vitality of our town, ensuring a prosperous and harmonious future for all residents.

Moreover, embracing diversity is about ensuring equal opportunity for everyone and breaking down barriers that may hinder participation or success. We are dedicated to creating policies and programs that provide access to education, employment, and community resources for all individuals, regardless of their background. By addressing and dismantling systemic obstacles, we pave the way for a more equitable and just society where everyone can achieve their full potential and contribute meaningfully to the community.

...the opportunities that bring our community together, the economic potential our area has, and the diversity; very large Indigenous and Franco-Ontarian populations and seeing more cultural diversity as the years go by. Something I know I didn't have growing up and that I very much appreciate for my children's developing worldviews.

FRANCE BOUVIER, COUNCILLOR

DIVERSITY

Initiatives and tactical actions are categorized into the immediate (3 to 12 months), short-term (1 to 3 years), mid-term (3 to7 years), and long-term (7 to 10 years) and rated by risk. **These initiatives aim to promote our vital diversity, enhance cultural understanding and collaboration, and drive innovation and economic growth by embracing diverse perspectives, cultures, and talents.**

IMMEDIATE
within the next 3 to 12 months

- Establish a Diversity Advisory Committee – comprising representatives from Anglophone, Francophone, Indigenous, and Newcomers to Canada to act as liaisons and to advise on policy development, ensuring municipal decisions reflect and respect the cultural diversity of the community
- Establish a sub-committee of the Diversity Advisory Committee to act as central point of welcome for newcomers to Cochrane
- Distribution and access to the Indigenous Allyship Guide
- Develop Truth & Reconciliation Plan

SHORT-TERM
within the next 1 to 3 years

- Cultural Competency Training – implement ongoing cultural competency training programs for municipal employees, educators, and community leaders
- Host a multi-cultural festival featuring traditional music, dance performances, art exhibitions, and culinary experiences from various cultural groups within the community
- Bilingual Signage and Wayfinding – implement bilingual signage throughout the town, including all public buildings, parks, and streets to reflect our Francophone heritage
- Intercultural Dialogue Initiatives – development of online forums and dialogue sessions that encourage open conversation between to help break down stereotypes, build relationships, and promote a more cohesive and inclusive community

MID-TERM
within the next 3 to 7 years

- Cultural Center Development – establish a multicultural community center in the downtown that serves as a gathering place for diverse cultural groups and newcomers to Canada
- Francophone Heritage Museum – designate a downtown historical building to house historical artifacts and contributions of the Francophone community
- Heritage Preservation Projects to preserve and celebrate the heritage of all cultural groups within the community

RED
High priority, greatest opportunity for positive impact or must be done due to legislative requirements, high cost involved, possible need for P3 resourcing, long-term impact

YELLOW
Minimal cost, minimal resources, positive impact

BLUE
Higher cost, higher resources, long-term impact

GREEN
No cost, easy to execute, positive impact

STRATEGIC PILLAR #6

Economic development is a dynamic process that requires constant adaptation to changing circumstances. This pillar is directly aligned with the overall Strategic Plan, ensuring that our efforts in economic development are cohesive and support our broader goals. Our focus is on key areas of: public-private partnerships (P3), indigenous partnerships, tourism, agriculture, post-secondary education, major transportation, and downtown revitalization.

PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS (P3)

Leveraging P3 partnerships is crucial for fostering economic growth and innovation. By collaborating with private sector and large enterprise entities, we can mobilize resources, share risk, and drive significant projects that may be beyond the reach of public funding alone. These partnerships will be pursued to enhance infrastructure, create job opportunities, and stimulate investment in the community.

INDIGENOUS PARTNERSHIPS

Building strong, respectful partnerships with Indigenous communities is a key priority. These partnerships are not simply P3 arrangements but are grounded in mutual respect, cultural understanding, and shared goals. Working closely with Indigenous leaders and organizations, we aim to support economic initiatives that honour their traditions and contribute to their prosperity. This includes co-developing projects, investing in Indigenous businesses, and creating opportunities for economic self-sufficiency.

...the welcoming, small town neighbours helping neighbours and the 'we're all family here' feeling is what I cherish the most. Whether born and raised, recently returned, or just arrived, Cochrane is "Hometown". A feeling of family and belonging, a place to grow and wind down… a Small Town lifestyle with Big Town opportunities…

SYLVIE CHARRON-LEMIEUX , COUNCILLOR

AGRICULTURE

Agriculture remains a cornerstone of our local economy. The Clay Belt is a large, fertile area characterized by heavy clay soils, which places our region above others for agricultural potential. The goal is to diversify investment into areas such as research and innovative farming opportunities, including ice-wine grape varietals, barley, and canola. These efforts could also support the growth of local businesses, particularly in developing craft breweries in town, making downtown a destination for food and beverage. Looking towards Alberta, which shares the same 49th parallel and has a distinct shorter growing season, we see a successful model where canola is a main agricultural product, and a thriving craft beverage industry exists. By learning from Alberta's example, we can apply similar strategies to boost our local agricultural economy.

TOURISM

Tourism is a vital economic driver that brings revenue and cultural exchange to our region. Our strategy will focus on growing tourism, enhancing the tourist experience, promoting local attractions, and developing new tourism products. Sustainable tourism practices will be prioritized to ensure that our natural and cultural resources are preserved for future generations.

DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION

Supporting local businesses and attracting new local business is essential for a vibrant and resilient economy. We will revitalize the downtown area and provide resources and programs to help local businesses thrive, including access to financing, training, and market expansion opportunities. Encouraging entrepreneurship and innovation within the community will foster a diverse and robust economic landscape.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Post-secondary education serves as a crucial economic strategy, particularly in regions facing unique demographic and societal challenges. With our Northern Ontario location, partnerships with institutions like the Northern Ontario School of Medicine (NOSM) are instrumental in addressing the region's higher-than-average aging demographic and healthcare needs. By aligning health

...it is a great place to raise a family because it is safe; opportunities to work in many sectors such as healthcare, mining, forestry and government; our festivals, winter carnivals, and recreation enables the family to enjoy a lifestyle that is unlike the city life. Opportunities are limitless if one chooses to call Cochrane home!

RODNEY HOOGENHOUD, COUNCILLOR

educational programs with community needs, these partnerships help retain graduating youth within the community, ensuring a steady stream of healthcare professionals dedicated to caring for local residents. Moreover, this strategy supports the broader goal of achieving designation as an age-friendly community, fostering an environment that promotes healthy and active aging.

In addition to healthcare, collaborations with specialized post-secondary schools such as the Olds College Centre for Innovation (OCCI) and the Western College of Veterinary Medicine from the University of Saskatchewan play a pivotal role in supporting the local economy. OCCI's focus on applied research for the agriculture industry directly benefits the farming community, enhancing productivity and sustainability through innovative practices. Similarly, the Western College of Veterinary Medicine's specialization in large animal clinical services is vital for both local agriculture and our treasured Polar Bear Habitat. These partnerships not only bolster the region's economic stability but also ensure that specialized knowledge and skills remain within the community, fostering growth and resilience.

MAJOR TRANSPORTATION – CANADA'S OIL EXPORTS

To address Canada's oil export challenge, the Town of Cochrane, Ontario can play a pivotal role by fostering strategic partnerships with key stakeholders across various provinces and regions. Cochrane, already recognized as the gateway to Ontario's north up to James Bay, stands poised to leverage its strategic transportation infrastructure for significant economic development. The town's existing transportation networks and investment partnerships with surrounding Indigenous communities position it uniquely to address the logistical challenges of transporting western oil to eastern Canada.

Through collaboration with the Province of Alberta, the port of Churchill in Manitoba, Ontario Northland, Moose Factory, and federal ministries responsible for infrastructure, natural resources, and economic development, as well as leveraging Public-Private Partnerships (P3s) with organizations such as Ontario Northland, the Ministry of Transportation for Canada, Arctic Gateway Group, and Western Corridor Inc., Cochrane can play a pivotal role in facilitating this critical flow of resources.

By leveraging these strategic alliances and resources, Cochrane can contribute significantly to solving Canada's oil export challenge. The potential shift in federal government to a Progressive Conservative leadership further underscores the likelihood of increased support and prioritization of this project. As Cochrane continues to develop its transportation strategies, it stands to significantly contribute to resolving the current difficulties in moving Canada's oil, reinforcing its position as a key player in Canada's transportation and export network.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT HIGHLIGHTS

The next decade presents a unique opportunity for our municipality to achieve unprecedented economic growth and development. As we prepare to implement our Economic Development Plan for the next three to ten years, we are focusing on key sectors that promise significant socio-economic benefits. These sectors include tourism, agriculture, and the revitalization of the downtown. Our strategy also emphasizes the importance of P3 (Public-Private Partnerships), Indigenous partnerships, and post-secondary education, particularly in developing a skilled labor force for secondary and tertiary healthcare needs as we embark on our journey to become designated as an age-friendly community.

By aligning Economic Development efforts with the overall Strategic Plan, our initiatives not only target growth but also strives to enhance the way of life for all residents, ensuring that our community thrives in a rapidly changing world.

Highlights of tactical initiatives for Economic Development are summarized below.

AGE-FRIENDLY COMMUNITY DESIGNATION

Cochrane's senior population is growing. This makes it more important than ever to support the health and well-being of our respected, older community members to lead healthy and active lives. This initiative reflects our commitment to listen to the needs of our aging population and work collaboratively to create age-friendly physical and social environments and where policies, services and structures related to the physical and social environment are designed to help seniors "age actively."

Our age-friendly community commitment:

- Recognizes that seniors have a wide range of skills and abilities and have a lot to offer to our community
- Understands and meets the age-related needs of seniors
- Respects the decisions and lifestyle choices of seniors
- Protects those seniors who are vulnerable
- Prioritizes the importance of including seniors in all areas of community life.

Our age-friendly community provides:

- Outdoor areas and public buildings that are pleasant, safe and accessible
- Housing that is affordable, safe and well designed
- Roads and walkways that are accessible and maintained
- Neighbourhoods that are safe
- Relationships that are respectful
- Health, transportation, and community support services that are available
- Opportunities for seniors to be socially active
- Information that is easy to find and easy to understand

TOURISM

Tourism is a cornerstone of our economic strategy. Our region's natural beauty, cultural heritage, and year-round recreational opportunities make it a prime destination for domestic and international visitors. Key initiatives include:

- **Destination Management –** effective destination planning is crucial for making the town a desirable tourist spot and enhancing our regional appeal. This involves strategic efforts to highlight the unique attractions and experiences that set our area apart.
- **Destination Branding of "Wonderfully Unexpected" –** consistent branding across all marketing materials to establish a strong and recognizable identity
- **Comprehensive Visitor Experience –** development of a holistic plan that includes accommodations, dining, attractions, and activities to ensure a comprehensive and enjoyable visitor experience.
- **Targeted Marketing Campaigns –** to raise the profile of the town, domestically and internationally, to reach potential visitors outside the immediate area.
- **Travel Partnerships –** with travel agencies, tour operators, and online travel platforms as well as collaborations with influencers and travel bloggers to reach a broader audience.
- **Group Travel Packages –** development of attractive travel packages for tour groups, including guided tours, accommodations, and special experiences.
- **Tourism Diversification through Agri-Tourism –** agricultural tourism (agri-tourism) provides the farming communities with an additional source of income and helps stabilize the local economy and reduce dependency on traditional farming alone. Agritourism offers visitors the opportunity to learn about farming practices in the clay belt and facilitates cultural exchange beyond Canada.
- **Snowmobile Tourism Diversification –** Cochrane is renowned as one of Canada's premier destinations for snowmobiling. By leveraging the town's significant snowmobile heritage and enhancing marketing efforts nationally and internationally, Cochrane can attract a broader audience of snowmobile enthusiasts.
    - **Snowmobile Heritage Museum –** transforming the museum into a traveling exhibit could further boost tourism by showcasing Cochrane's rich snowmobile history and attracting visitors from various regions.
    - **Relocating the Snowmobile Museum –** another strategic advantage is to relocate the Snowmobile Heritage Museum from the Polar Bear Habitat to its own dedicated location in the downtown core. This move allows both attractions to flourish independently. A standalone museum in the downtown core could offer expanded exhibits, interactive displays, and be directly connected specialized snowmobile events at Commando Lake.

POLAR BEAR HABITAT

Economic Strategy for Cochrane Polar Bear Habitat

"Our mission is to foster a collaborative environment dedicated to the conservation, care, and study of polar bears, providing a unique opportunity for hands-on experience and advanced research in polar bear health and behavior. This center will serve as a hub for scientific excellence and public education, contributing to the global understanding and preservation of polar bears."

1. Infrastructure Improvement & Maintenance

- Road Enhancement – partner with Ontario Northland to invest in the maintenance and repair of the road leading to the Polar Bear Habitat. Advocate for renaming the road to "Polar Bear Way/ Chemin de l'Ours Polaire" to enhance visibility and branding.
- Collaboration with Town's Infrastructure Director – Work closely with the town's director of infrastructure to develop a comprehensive asset management plan for the facility, ensuring long-term sustainability and upkeep.

2. Facility Expansion & Upgrades

- Overnight Accommodations – invest in the development of overnight accommodations for visitors. This could include eco-friendly lodges or cabins, enhancing the tourist experience and encouraging longer stays.
- Trading Post Expansion – expand the Board of Trade Building to include a dedicated "trading post" for tourists, offering local crafts, souvenirs, and educational materials related to polar bears and the habitat.
- Relocation of Snowmobile Museum – allows the opportunity to repurpose this space into a learning lab to support the Polar Bear Habitat in becoming an internationally recognized center for education and research, where veterinary students, visiting professionals, scientists from Polar Bear International, and professors of Veterinary Medicine can educate and learn.

3. Educational & Community Engagement

- School Group Field Trips – develop programs to attract school group field trips from across the region, providing educational tours and interactive learning experiences about polar bears and conservation efforts.

4. Strategic P3 Partnerships

Leveraging existing associations with Polar Bears International and Churchill, Manitoba, will be instrumental in attracting P3 partners to build a state-of-the-art learning lab, expand operations, and develop a versatile multi-purpose facility.

By implementing these strategies, the Cochrane Polar Bear Habitat will enhance its infrastructure, capabilities and facilities, and increase its appeal as a world-class center for education, research, conservation, and tourism.

COCHRANE SITE SELECTION PROFILE DEVELOPMENT

To support efforts to attract new residents, industries and businesses, we are developing a comprehensive site selection package that will be available in both digital and print formats. The digital component will include videography and a storybook-style presentation, similar to what Pictou County, Nova Scotia offers, including local business spotlights.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ce5eRmOboE

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AUInauT80mc

The combined digital and print strategy not only meets the needs of potential site selectors by providing engaging and detailed information but also allows us to reach a larger, expanded audience, enhancing our ability to showcase the opportunities and advantages that make Cochrane a "wonderfully unexpected" place to live and work.

To attract new residents, large business, small business, and tourists, we will create both a video and print catalogue of short materials tailored to each target audience. The site selection profile will include detailed economic and demographic information, showcasing local workforce demographics, income levels, and employment rates. It will outline the municipality's robust infrastructure and transportation networks, emphasizing connectivity and accessibility, and provide clear details on zoning regulations and available commercial and industrial land.

Additionally, the materials will be customized for specific industries such as major retail, manufacturing, technology, logistics, and healthcare, highlighting local industry clusters and specialized workforce skills. Success stories and testimonials from businesses that have established operations in Cochrane will be included to demonstrate the tangible benefits and advantages of choosing this location, and Way of Life factors, such as housing options, healthcare facilities, educational institutions, and recreational activities, along with local residents sharing why they love living and raising their families here, will also be prominently featured to enhance the town's appeal.

DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION

Cochrane's downtown is currently run down, empty, and unappealing. Given its proximity to the town's central festival hub, Commando Lake, a complete transformation of the downtown area is essential to support Cochrane's growth initiatives, tourism initiatives, and enhance the Way of Life for residents. Leaving downtown in its current state will hinder the town's progress.

The strategy focuses on four (4) economic projects for revitalization:

SEASONAL LANDSCAPING

From vibrant spring blooms to cozy fall foliage, each season brings its own unique opportunities and challenges for maintaining a beautiful outdoor space that always looks inviting and well-maintained.

Seasonal Planting & Maintenance Program

Implementing a seasonal planting and maintenance program involves planting a variety of seasonal flowers, shrubs, and trees that are sustainable year-round and provide year-round visual appeal.

Themed Streetscaping & Decoration

Creating themed streetscaping and decoration plans for different seasons throughout the downtown area and parks. In addition to seasonal flowers, shrubs, and trees this includes seasonal banners and other seasonal displays. As an example, Winter streetscaping can be celebrated with holiday lights and ice sculptures making the downtown area and parks a year-round destination.

1

The Accessibility Project

Involves regular engagement with residents with disabilities and caregivers to ensure any implemented measures effectively meet needs and promote a welcoming environment and includes:

Enhanced Sidewalk & Crosswalk Infrastructure

Improving the physical infrastructure of sidewalks and crosswalks is a fundamental initiative to enhance accessibility in the downtown area. This includes widening sidewalks to accommodate wheelchairs and mobility scooters, ensuring they are well-maintained and free of obstructions, and installing curb cuts at intersections to facilitate smooth transitions. Crosswalks will be clearly marked and equipped with tactile paving to aid those with visual impairments. Additionally, implementing pedestrian-activated signals with audible cues will further assist visually impaired individuals in safely navigating our streets.

Accessible Public Spaces & Amenities

Ensuring all public buildings, parks, and recreational areas are fully accessible, with features such as ramps, automatic doors, and accessible restrooms. Furthermore, ensuring adequate designated parking spaces are available and clearly marked as well as installing seating areas with benches designed to accommodate individuals with mobility issues to provide rest stops for those who need them.

2

Walking Museum Beautification Project

Involves transforming the exterior of vacant buildings, creating a destination for residents, tourists and for attracting new local businesses. Local, emerging, and diverse artists will be invited to create vibrant, thematic murals on the exteriors of vacant buildings as well as being offered the use of vacant building, street-facing windows for rotating art exhibits, each to reflect the town's history, culture, and diversity with interactive elements for visitors and residents to enjoy further. Designation of historical buildings, one to house the Snowmobile Museum, one to house the Francophone History Museum, one to house an Indigenous Art Gallery, creates a pathway to the downtown as a destination.

3

Downtown as a Destination Project

The Downtown Destination Attraction Strategy aims to transform the downtown area into a vibrant culinary and cultural destination, drawing inspiration from successful revitalization projects like Joanna Gaines' Silos in downtown Waco, Toronto's Distillery District, Ottawa's Byward Market, and Canmore's Mainstreet.

This initiative focuses on creating a unique culinary and cultural experience that showcases our local agriculture, unique food stores, expansive diverse heritage, while attracting new businesses such as craft breweries, wine shops and art galleries, turning downtown into a must-visit location for residents and tourists alike - making it the number one tourist attraction in the Cochrane District.

Because the buying habits of people increasingly trend towards online shopping to save time and money, the desire to get out and socialize remains strong. This revitalization strategy is geared toward social and economic development, recognizing that people still value face-to-face interactions and community engagement. By creating a lively and attractive downtown, we aim to provide a space, as an extension of Commando Lake, where people can come together, enjoy local offerings, and contribute to the economic vitality of our town.

4

Strategic Objectives

Culinary Excellence & Diversity

Craft Breweries, Wineries, Meaderies, & Vodka Distilleries – encourage the establishment of craft beverage business to serve as anchor attractions; supports clay belt agriculture farming opportunities as well.

- Unique Food Stores – specialty food stores attraction to complement Bussiere's Italian Sausage Butcher Shop and Saveurs Boréales Cheese Shop to provide visitors with a taste of local flavors and unique culinary experiences.
- Events & Festivals – food and drink festivals, culinary events and the relocation of the farmers market to downtown to celebrate local cuisine and culture.

Incentives & Support

- Financial Incentives, Grants, & Support Services – to encourage the establishment and refurbishment of existing building to new culinary and cultural businesses.
- Accessibility Incentives – assistance for small business owners for compliance initiatives regarding the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA).

Infrastructure & Aesthetic Enhancements

- Accessible Pedestrian-Friendly Design – development of a pedestrian-friendly downtown area with wide sidewalks, outdoor seating, and attractive public spaces, ensuring the entire area is easily accessible and enjoyable for everyone.
- Historical & Architectural Preservation – preserve and highlight the historical and architectural features of downtown buildings through restoration projects and adaptive reuse, maintaining the area's unique character while accommodating new businesses.

Branding and Marketing Initiatives

The importance of branding is a critical component of any downtown revitalization project because it helps create a recognizable and memorable identity that attracts both locals and tourists. Successful examples, such as Toronto's Distillery District and Ottawa's ByWard Market, demonstrate how a strong brand can transform an area into a thriving destination. The Distillery District, for instance, rebranded itself from an industrial past into a vibrant cultural and commercial hub, drawing people with its unique charm and rich history. Similarly, ByWard Market has established itself as a key attraction in Ottawa through effective branding that highlights its diverse offerings and historical significance.

Creating a Unique Identity for Cochrane's Downtown

To achieve similar success, Cochrane's downtown needs a distinctive and appealing brand that embodies what makes it "wonderfully unexpected." This involves developing a cohesive brand strategy that includes a memorable name, logo, and visual identity reflecting the area's unique character and offerings. By doing so, we can create a strong, positive perception that resonates with visitors and residents alike.

A well-defined brand will not only amplify the unique aspects of Cochrane but also help to establish a term that is easily remembered and recognized, ultimately driving more foot traffic and economic activity to the downtown area.

Community involvement is essential in creating a downtown brand that truly reflects the identity and aspirations of its residents. A branding initiative that engages the community in the process will ensure that the chosen downtown brand resonates. To kickstart this initiative, we are considering the following brands to capture the spirit of Cochrane's downtown:

- Polar Bear Junction
- Cochrane's Arctic Avenue and Snowmobile Square
- Bear Tracks District
- Gourmet Lane

4

ONTARIO
COCHRANE
WONDERFULLY UNEXPECTED

TOWN OF COCHRANE

APPENDICES & PLANNING RESOURCES CATALOGUE

ONTARIO, CA
COCHRANE
WONDERFULLY UNEXPECTED

FORWARD

Welcome to the "Planning Resources" catalogue. This document is a collection of appendices and resources designed to support the municipality in executing its strategic initiatives and planning for the future. Within these pages, you will find valuable tools, data, and guidelines that can assist in addressing current challenges and support future development of the community.

The resources provided here serve as a reference to help the municipality navigate the complexities of planning, offering insights into financial supports necessary for effective execution.

We hope you find this document to be a valuable asset in your efforts to build a thriving and resilient community.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION GUIDE
INDIGENOUS ALLY TOOLKIT
DIVERSITY, EQUITY, & INCLUSION: COUNCILS & COMMITTEES TOOLKIT
SERVICES FOR AN AGING RURAL POPULATION & NORTHERN PERSPECTIVE
FUNDING & GRANT OPPORTUNITIES
CASE STUDIES
- #1 – OVERNIGHT ACCOMMODATIONS: ASPEN CROSSING
- #2 – SHELBURNE: A TOWN IN TRANSITION
- #3 – FROM THE BRINK OF BUST TO BOOM: SMALLTOWN SUCCESS STORIES

CONCLUSION
- THE YEAR-ROUND MAGIC OF OPPORTUNITIES, EVENTS, PUBLIC ART, & PLACEMAKING
- CLAYBELT AGRICULTURE & THE ART OF CRAFT WINE & BEER

ONTARIO
COCHRANE
WONDERFULLY UNEXPECTED

DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION GUIDE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD

- WHAT IS DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION & WHY DO IT?
- THE STRATEGIC APPROACH
- BENEFITS OF DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION PROGRAMS
- TIME FRAME FOR THE DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION PROCESS
- TOOLKIT STRUCTURE & RESOURCES

STAGE I: PREPARATION

- INTRODUCTION
- IS YOUR COMMUNITY READY FOR A DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION PROGRAM?
- IDENTIFYING STAKEHOLDERS
- THE COST OF DEVELOPING YOUR ACTION PLAN
- BUILDING A TEAM BY ENGAGING STAKEHOLDERS
- HOLDING THE PUBLIC MEETING
- CONDUCTING SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISES
- PREPARING A PRELIMINARY WORK PLAN

STAGE II: COLLECT DATA & ANALYZE

- INTRODUCTION
- DOWNTOWN MARKET ANALYSIS
- BUILDING AND BUSINESS INVENTORY
- BUSINESS MIX & LOCATION ANALYSIS
- BUSINESS OWNER SURVEY
- RESIDENT SURVEY

STAGE III: DEVELOP GOALS & ACTION PLANS

- INTRODUCTION
- SHARE STAGE II DATA RESULTS
- ACTION PLANS & GOALS
- THE ACTION PLAN

STAGE IV: IMPLEMENT & MONITOR

- INTRODUCTION
- CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT CONDUCIVE TO BUSINESS INVESTMENT IN THE DOWNTOWN
- IDENTIFY & DEVELOP NEW BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES
- BENCHMARKING & MONITORING THE DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION PROJECT

CONCLUSION

FOREWORD

This toolkit is designed to support a downtown revitalization project as one of the Way of Life priorities for Cochrane as identified through community engagement. It is meant to guide Economic Development through a step-by-step process as well as provide resources and tools to assist with the completion of the tasks associated with each step.

This toolkit is useful for teams, support staff, volunteer business improvement groups, the Board of Trade, and local business owners who need/want to understand the costs and benefits of a downtown revitalization plan.

It includes tools and templates and simple do-it-yourself techniques to engage the community and build relationships among local business owners to support coordinating a downtown revitalization project.

WHAT IS DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION & WHY DO IT?

The revitalization of Cochrane's downtown is not just about retail stores and shopping, it's about the historical heart of the community and a place where community can gather, socialize, and celebrate.

The downtown of Cochrane, with its easy access to Commando Lake, has the opportunity to thrive and become a destination that residents and visitors will want to experience. Revitalizing the downtown area will not only bolster tourism as an economic driver but also reclaim visitors from the northern remote communities, redirecting them from Timmins back to Cochrane as their preferred destination.

DEFINITION

Downtown revitalization is the process of improving the economic, physical, and social well-being of a community's traditional downtown centre by:

- Strengthening local business and encouraging investment from building and property owners
- Creating enjoyable public streets and spaces animated by a variety of creative and civic activities
- Enhancing the downtown's visual appeal through seasonal decorations, including vibrant flower displays, installing attractive street furniture, such as benches, planters, and decorative lighting to create inviting areas for pedestrians as well as implementing Indigenous and public art installations and murals to add character and intrigue to outdoor spaces
- Providing work and living opportunities that respond to community needs across a spectrum of ages and interests
- Implementing accessibility upgrades such as wheelchair ramps, tactile paving, and widened sidewalks to ensure that the downtown core is inclusive and easily navigable for individuals of all abilities

THE STRATEGIC APPROACH

This guide follows a comprehensive, strategic approach to downtown revitalization, which includes:

- Economic Development objectives such as helping existing business owners access funding for accessibility upgrades, attracting new businesses that complement the community by offering financial incentives or tax breaks to encourage adaptive reuse or renovation of existing buildings, supporting the development of mixed-use properties, combining retail, residential, and office spaces to create a vibrant and sustainable downtown community.
- Leadership & Management through the development of a business improvement association (BIA) to collectively promote downtown businesses, host regular events, such as farmers' markets, festivals, and cultural performances, to draw foot traffic downtown and stimulate economic activity for local business.
- Communication & Promotion to ensure that the identity and positive image of the downtown is communicated, to enhance marketing efforts and collaboration with tourism organizations to promote downtown as a destination.
- Streetscape Improvements such as pedestrian crosswalks, street furniture, landscaping, lighting, signing, and accessibility enhancements.

For long-term success, the process needs a balanced approach and coordinated action. We developed this guide for the Town of Cochrane based on the comprehensive revitalization methodology of the Main Street Four-Point Approach® throughout the United States and the Ontario Regional Economic Development's programming and resources.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

This manual supports a comprehensive, integrated approach to downtown revitalization that yields tangible short-term results as well as fostering a multi-year commitment and follows these guiding principles:

- Plan for the long term as success doesn't happen overnight, but rather as a result of a variety of projects and initiatives over time
- Be strategic to avoid projects that take a lot of energy but have limited impact
- Break down long-term goals into smaller achievable tasks that are visible to the community
- Base decisions on information obtained through systematic and sound analysis
- Use a complimentary and participatory approach to mobilize local business owners and entrepreneurs; embrace the talents of community members and organizations

Downtown revitalization must be community-driven. Successful solutions for downtowns are developed by the community for the community. Celebrate the wins to acknowledge achievements and recognize volunteers consistently and regularly.

BENEFITS OF DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION PROGRAMS

Your entire community will benefit from an integrated downtown revitalization strategy that enhances local market opportunities while improving the downtown streetscape.

Table 1 offers a list of how different types of stakeholders/organizations can expect to benefit from an integrated strategy.

The impact of revitalization activities spreads across a variety of stakeholders. The smaller the population and number of businesses, the more important it is to involve every stakeholder.

In Cochrane, the process may seem more like "community" revitalization than "downtown" revitalization in that all business and everyone in the community are likely to be affected in some way. It's important to effectively communicate and demonstrate the positive economic impact of downtown revitalization.

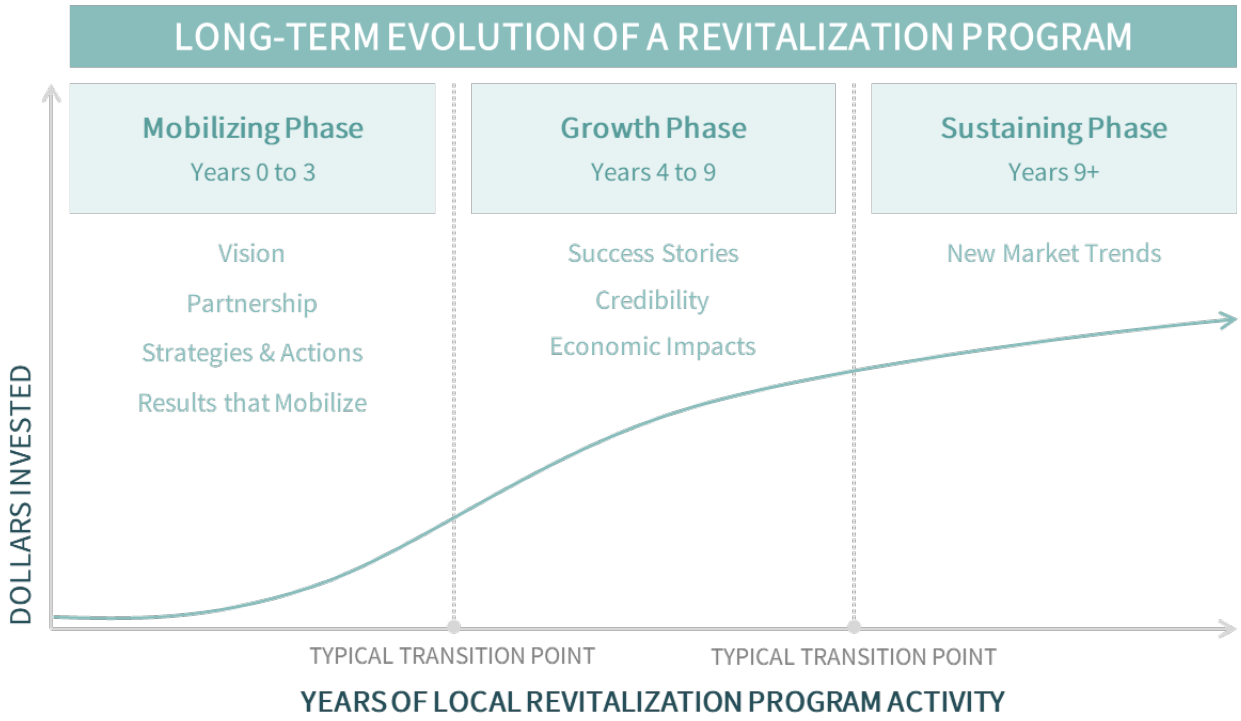
Stakeholders	Benefits
Local Business Owners	♦ Greater opportunity for growth, expansion, and retention, reinvestment, and profit ♦ Expanded customer base ♦ Less financial risk ♦ Expanded employee base
Financial/Insurance Institutions	♦ Expanded business customer base ♦ Retention and reinvestment opportunities
Cochrane Board of Trade	♦ Potential new member businesses ♦ Healthier overall local business engagement and involvement ♦ Increase for Tourism partnerships
Residents	♦ Local accessibility to goods and services ♦ Opportunities for volunteerism and leadership ♦ Preservation of community for future generations ♦ More employment opportunities ♦ Investment in existing downtown infrastructure might result in smaller tax increases since it is more cost-effective than to add new services to outlying areas ♦ Sustainable, low-risk of abandoning the project between council terms ♦ Enhances the Way of Life

Local Government	♦ Increased property tax base ♦ Protection of property values and infrastructure investment ♦ Business retention and attraction of new business ♦ Attraction of new residents ♦ Increase of community pride and trust, enhances the Way of Life over the long-term ♦ Reduced pressure from the community "to do something" ♦ Sustainable, low-risk of abandoning the project between council terms ♦ Opportunity for expanded Tourism
Community Organizations (Clubs, Organizations, Senior Citizens, Arts Groups, Etc.)	♦ Improved Way of Life throughout the community — pride and capacity to undertake other projects is boosted, creates excitement ♦ New membership potential among new residents ♦ Preservation of community history ♦ Opportunities for increased interest for volunteerism and community events
Local Schools	♦ Youth involvement in volunteering ♦ Potential youth employment ♦ More places to go and activities for youths ♦ Youth led downtown and parks annual clean-up program
Businesses Outside the Downtown	♦ Increased visitor traffic to the community ♦ Increased business from overall healthier economy ♦ Additional amenities for employees and clients ♦ Partnership and engagement opportunities with downtown business

TIME FRAME FOR THE DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION PROCESS

When downtown revitalization is framed within a longer time period of 3 to 10 years, it can be divided into three distinct phases:

- **Mobilizing Phase –** years zero to three for organizing, assessing, planning, and implementing.
- **Growth Phase –** years four to nine; economic impacts are being achieved; ongoing improvements are being realized; downtown volunteers need to be recruited to replace those who may have moved on.
- **Sustaining Phase –** spanning years beyond year nine. Focuses on maintaining the momentum of downtown revitalization efforts by monitoring progress and fostering community engagement to ensure the long-term sustainability and vibrancy of the downtown area.



TOOLKIT STRUCTURE & RESOURCES

The sections of the toolkit are based on a four-stage process:

1. Preparation
2. Analysis
3. Goals & Tactical Plan(s)
4. Implement and Monitor

Pre-Work Stage – there are a number of preparatory steps including:

- Organizational Capacity – identifying available resources and types of resourcing options
- Community Assessment & Needs Analysis

Stage I Preparation – the organizing steps include forming a Steering Board or Committee, hiring a term role reporting to the Economic Development Director to manage all activities, and holding a public meeting to launch the process. This leads to the development of the vision for the downtown and the identification of short-term tactical actions that lead to "quick wins" and expand community interest.

Stage II Analysis – collect data through stakeholder interviews, focus groups and surveys to understand the current retail service and businesses, recent business closures, and supply and demand in the downtown core. Asset management and determining how best to respond to physical issues and opportunities.

Stage III Goals & Tactical Plan(s) – interpreting results from Stage II as well as determining a market position for the downtown. Prioritize specific goals and actions to provide the direction for the immediate year as well as the next two years and onward.

Stage IV Implement & Monitor – implementing the Tactical Plan and selecting key performance indicators for benchmarking. Initiatives that have been completed in prior stages need to be communicated and promoted to the broader community, and achievements of volunteers should be recognized with awards or celebrations. **Develop an Annual Report Card to track progress and inform Council.**

STAGE I
PREPARATION

STAGE I
PREPARATION

STAGE II
COLLECT DATA & ANALYZE

STAGE III
DEVELOP GOALS & ACTION PLANS

STAGE IV
IMPLEMENT & MONITOR

STAGE I: PREPARATION

INTRODUCTION

This section contains:

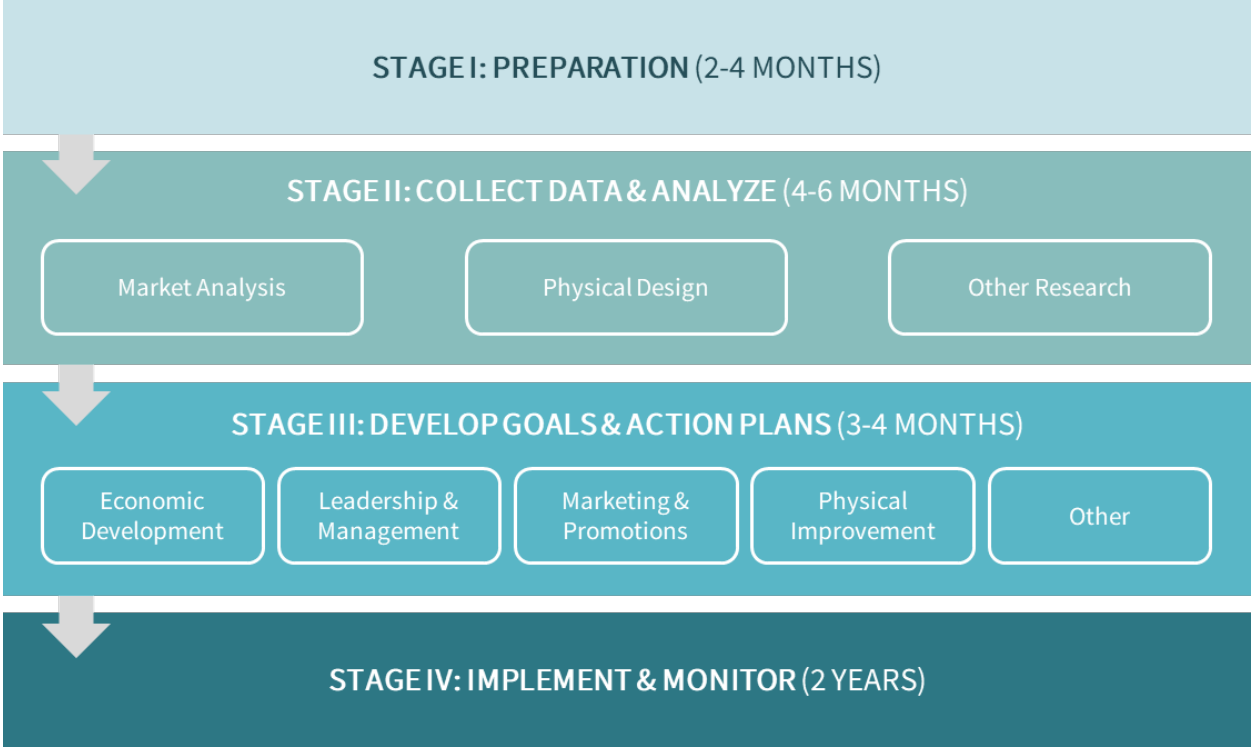
- A time frame for developing your downtown revitalization Strategic Plan
- A set of questions to help you determine if your community is ready
- Suggestions for identifying stakeholders
- Estimates of human and financial resource requirements

STAGES I TO III

Completing Stages I to III will take about 9 to 12 months once a dedicated resource is in place.

STAGE IV

The Implement and Monitor stage will take about two years. Two years is sufficient time to complete several projects and to see them start "bearing fruit". When positive outcomes are being achieved, it is a good time to renew community and volunteer involvement and review the types of actions that remain to be accomplished or identify new ideas that may be relevant for downtown revitalization.



IS YOUR COMMUNITY READY FOR A DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION PROGRAM?

Successful downtown revitalization requires local champions who are willing to devote time and effort. It involves coordinating a complex but interrelated series of events and relying heavily on the cooperation of various community groups.

Generally, successful revitalization will depend on the following factors:

- Committed leadership; Economic Development Director, dedicated resource(Coordinator) and Council
- Broad-based participation; local community and local business
- A shared vision of the future; Council, Administration, and Community
- Realistic goals and plan for action
- Effective communication
- Adequate financial resources
- Community Engagement; volunteers
- Long-term commitment

The community's willingness to make a long-term commitment indicates an understanding of the long-term process and minimizes, if not eliminates, the risk of a new Council "cancelling" the project.

The dedicated resource (Coordinator) must be influential to ensure local business and the community is open to change and would be willing to consider new and different ways of doing things.

Some questions to help determine if the community is ready for downtown revitalization:

DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION READINESS QUESTIONS

Citizen Involvement & Volunteers

1. Are there people in the community who are visionaries and action-oriented, and who could be recruited to serve on a Management Committee?
2. Are there people with the skills to lead downtown revitalization plans and projects to completion?
3. Is there a strong volunteer force in the community, capable of sustaining a complex project over an extended period of time?
4. Are people from different walks of life currently involved in organizing and running community projects?

Leaders & Municipal Support

5. Is there active municipal support for the development of a downtown strategy, both at council and staff levels?
6. Is there an existing organization with a primary focus on the downtown and economic development?
7. Is there an organization in the community that will take a lead role and provide support to the project?
8. Are there respected people that would champion this project and help build support?

Organizations Working Together

9. Is there active support for economic development activities from a range of community organizations?
10. Have there been a number of successful community projects that have involved community groups coming together for a common goal?
11. Do organizations in the community have effective relationships with other communities and other economic development organizations?
12. Are relationships healthy among people and organizations in the community?

Community-Based Planning

13. Does the community have a current, comprehensive economic strategy with an action plan?
14. Does the community have an overall vision of what it wants to be like in the future?
15. Is there a good balance between new ideas and a respect for tradition and history among community members?
16. Is economic development activity in the community well organized and managed?
17. Does the community have the ability to access funding to develop opportunities?

Community Communications

18. Is there regular communication among community groups to inform and involve each other?
19. Is the community able to deal constructively with conflict?
20. Do leaders regularly communicate progress to community organizations, volunteers and citizens?

IDENTIFYING STAKEHOLDERS

One of the first steps is to identify key stakeholders who might want to be involved in the revitalization process.

The motivation, determination, energy, and commitment necessary for successful revitalization must come from within the community. Downtown revitalization works only when the community's merchants, building and property owners, residents, business associations and municipal government commit to ensuring the long-term success of revitalizing their downtown.

THE COST OF DEVELOPING YOUR ACTION PLAN

To ensure the long-term sustainability of a downtown revitalization program, adequate financial resources are necessary. Use this chart as an example of how to forecast a potential budget for the Town of Cochrane.

Annual Expenses	
Office Supplies	$1,500
Office Space & Equipment Rental — e.g., computer	$7,500
Postage, Photocopying, Telephone, Internet, etc.	$3.500
Hall/Room Rental & Refreshments for Meetings & "Kickoff" Meeting	$5,000
Downtown Revitalization Coordinator Salary	$65,000
Training Conferences and/or Workshops	$7,500
Total Annual Expenses	$90,000
One-Time Expenses	
Data-Gathering Expenses – Survey, Desk Research	$10,000
Design Consultant for the Architectural & Streetscape Drawings	$60,000
Business Recruitment Costs	$7,500
Total One-Time Expense to Complete Downtown Revitalization Strategic Plan	$50,000
Project Implementation	Highly Variable

The first part of Stage I includes information for hiring a dedicated resource (coordinator), structuring a Management Committee/Steering Board, and holding a "kickoff" meeting.

The second part of Stage I offers advice on how to define a study area and where to look to find existing studies and plans. It also explains a number of self-assessment exercises, including First Impressions Community Exchange (FICE).

Finally, this section concludes by explaining how to create an initial downtown revitalization vision and a preliminary work plan for the next six to nine months.

BUILDING A TEAM BY ENGAGING STAKEHOLDERS

Engaging stakeholders means assigning specific ongoing roles and/or identifying specific events and points in the process when input can be provided.

- **Management Committee/Steering Board Members –** Chair should be the Economic Development Director with up to 5 or 6 community members; dedicated resource (coordinator) reports to this group.
- **Dedicated Resource/Coordinator –** the person hired to facilitate the activities of the Management Committee/Steering Board and other working groups.
- **Chair of the Management Committee/Steering Board -** the leader and spokesperson (Executive Director).
- **Working Group Members –** working groups are subcommittees of the Management Committee/Steering Board dedicated to specific initiatives.

THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE/STEERING BOARD

This team of volunteers will provide focus and lead the project throughout the process by:

- Overseeing implementation of the revitalization work plan and the activities of working groups
- Establishing project policies, framework, and goals
- Approval of the budget and annual fees
- Hire and monitor the coordinator
- Advise and guide the coordinator
- Complete the Annual Report Card and present to Council
- Liaise and maintain a climate of cooperation throughout the community

DEDICATED RESOURCE/COORDINATOR

The coordinator manages the delivery of the overall project, implements, and monitors all revitalization actions and activities.

The coordinator must be influential and an effective communicator. Their role includes engaging the community, creating the plan, and working with volunteer and working groups to implement actions that progress revitalization.

The coordinator works hand in hand with the community, and never loses sight that this is the community's revitalization project.

The coordinator will typically:

- Survey local businesses for opinions and follow up on any issues identified
- Manage and coordinate design/rehabilitation projects
- Organize and lead information sessions about the downtown revitalization project
- Maintain records of initiatives completed as a result of the revitalization project and assist in preparing the Annual Report Card
- Communicate initiatives completed, actions to be taken, and generate ongoing excitement for the project
- Be the main point of contact for the revitalization project

In summary there are three main purposes for a dedicated resource/coordinator:

1. Process facilitation
2. Communications and promotion
3. Mobilize and engage volunteers and other local resources

The real benefit of a dedicated resource/coordinator is in mobilizing and engaging the community — not just allowing community members to have a say in what ought to be done, but in organizing activities for which local people's talents, skills and ambitions are harnessed and put to use. This dedicated resource/coordinator is also key in ensuring that the project maintains it's priority during changes in Council.

MUNICIPAL COUNCIL & STAFF

Municipal Council support is critical to the success of any community's downtown revitalization effort. This support should definitely be in place before a community proceeds with revitalization efforts.

Municipal Council roles may include the following:

- Initial endorsement of the project
- Financial assistance to hire a dedicated resource/coordinator
- Capital projects or financial assistance for the implementation of design, marketing or economic development strategies

- In-kind assistance to cover expenses for a downtown revitalization office
- Political support for others to get involved in the implementation of the project
- Municipal staff may also play a valuable role in providing necessary background work to help initiate and support the process

VOLUNTEERS

Community volunteers are critical to the success of any downtown revitalization project. A community-based, volunteer-driven approach generates more support, ownership, and commitment by the community.

When recruiting volunteers, a Coordinator should understand what motivates different people to volunteer such as:

1. Social Connectors – people who like to do things with other people and be part of a group; they are effective at conducting surveys, organizing festivals and performing other activities that involve lots of personal contact - but they are not necessarily good team leaders
2. Project Managers – people who are motivated to ensure actions are completed effectively, detailed oriented
3. Community Influencers – people who can, with one phone call, raise money, arrange to have a street closed for a festival or do something else that would take someone else much longer to do - may not attend many meetings

Since different tasks need different types of volunteers, some thought should be given to the type of volunteers to be recruited. A balance of each type of volunteer is recommended.

POTENTIAL PARTNERS

- Community Organizations (Historical Societies, Service Clubs, Youth Organizations) – community organizations can help in areas of recruiting volunteers and can also support and encourage community enthusiasm and be a source of fundraising/funding for implementing events and festivals and public spaces.
- Schools – engaging students to volunteer will instill a sense of ownership and pride for future generations.

OUTSIDE EXPERTISE

Within a community-driven process, investing in external expertise can be wise. The coordinator may not have all of the professional expertise required for every aspect of the downtown revitalization process. Outside expertise is often obtained for:

- Market analysis results and in following up with business development/ advisory actions
- Design professionals for developing plans for physical improvements, complete construction drawings and provide detailed information for implementing design projects
- Funding consultants can identify funding opportunities, complete grant applications, and manage reporting measures for granting bodies

LOCAL MEDIA

Unique and consistent ways to promote the downtown revitalization project is a great way to let the community know about the program and to encourage participation. Celebrating the accomplishments of the committees in the media is an excellent way to acknowledge the hard work of the committee, volunteers and to raise the awareness of downtown revitalization throughout the community.

HOLDING THE PUBLIC MEETING

The public meeting or "kickoff" meeting is an opportunity to ensure from the outset that the entire community is aware of the downtown revitalization process, and to invite as many partners as possible to become involved.

At the event, provide an information kit and a sign-up sheet for those attending who wish to volunteer, be part of a working group or committee or other involvement in the process.

CONDUCTING SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISES

Five self-assessment exercises are recommended:

1. Recent Performance of the Downtown
2. Functions of the Downtown
3. 24 Hours in the Downtown
4. Walking Tour
5. Situational Analysis

RECENT PERFORMANCE OF THE DOWNTOWN

This exercise identifies a maximum of ten (10) different roles and functions that the downtown can serve. The Management Committee/Steering Board provides input as to whether they think the downtown is improving or getting worse in each of the ten (10) areas.

The purpose is to get people talking about why they have certain perceptions and whether people representing different sectors have similar views. Further guided discussion can bring to the surface the motivations behind people's answers - how do you know things are worse or better? One reason to do this at the outset of the revitalization process is to remind people that the downtown isn't just about retail stores and to ensure that they consider the other important functions.

FUNCTIONS OF THE DOWNTOWN

This exercise features 25 characteristics of any small town's downtown. Committee members rate the performance of the downtown for each function on a scale of 0 to 4. Poor scores in any one category can help the committee to prioritize actions and initiatives.

24 HOURS IN THE DOWNTOWN

This exercise involves asking local residents to identify the activities taking place in the downtown at various times throughout the day. Each activity is recorded in a timeline format. This process helps identify the types of activities that occur in the downtown as well as the different stakeholders who live in the community and serves to support actions and initiatives to be undertaken.

WALKING TOUR

This activity takes people out of the meeting room to parts of the downtown they may not ordinarily visit. Provide groups of two to three people with pens, paper, a clipboard, cameras, a map of downtown if possible, and a set of prompting questions. After about an hour of recording their "on-the-street" observations, group members transfer their observations onto a large map of the downtown. The Coordinator can use this map, the written observations and photos to identify short- term projects to keep the group motivated during the data-gathering stage.

SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

Like looking at a map, one cannot decide where to go or how to get there until one knows where they are. There are several assessment techniques that can be used to draw out from community members what they perceive as their current situation, where they could go to and what they have to build upon SWOT (**S**trengths, **W**eaknesses, **O**pportunities and **T**hreats) analysis is one of the most familiar community assessment techniques.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS COMMUNITY EXCHANGE: "SEEING THINGS IN A WHOLE NEW LIGHT"

Unlike the five self-assessment exercises described above, the First Impressions Community Exchange (FICE) brings in an outsider's perspective. Engage volunteer "visiting teams" from two or three surrounding communities to undertake unannounced, incognito assessments of each other's community, using a comprehensive guide and questionnaire. Each visiting team records its observations and prepares a report to provide constructive feedback to the exchange community.

Undertaking a FICE during the initial stages of a downtown revitalization process has several benefits. It reveals the first impression a community conveys to outsiders, who may be tourists, potential residents, or potential new business owners.

A visiting team's insights can provide a fresh perspective on the downtown's appearance and services (both strengths and shortcomings), either reinforcing the self-assessments or revealing new aspects of the downtown.

After receiving the visiting team's report, the local Coordinator and Management Committee can identify specific concrete short-term projects to tackle while the broader action planning process continues. Small, early successes can help to build support for longer term, more costly actions.

PREPARING A PRELIMINARY WORK PLAN

The last step in Stage I (Preparation) is developing a more detailed work plan which sets out the tasks, and steps to complete over the next six to nine months. The Management Committee/Steering Board and Coordinator will use this work plan to stay organized through the following stages and ensure progress is being made.

An important consideration for developing the work plan for the downtown revitalization process is the municipal budget planning process. It is recommended that all revitalization projects be ready for Municipal Council's consideration well ahead and in advance of budget planning. One task to complete is to check with the Town's Clerk that date that this project needs to be ready for Council review and budget planning.

The preparation stage is also an opportunity to identify some short term action items for the committee to work on during the data collection and analysis phase. It is important to tackle some visible, high impact, short-term projects throughout the time when the less visible data collection and analysis phase is taking place. These smaller projects will help to promote and garner support from the community.

Some examples of downtown revitalization "quick wins" are:

- Seasonal decorations – e.g., Christmas lights on telephone poles
- A cleanup day involving young people
- A new downtown event – e.g., farmer's market, sidewalk sale, food festival or long table, clothing drive or open-mic night
- Fill empty storefronts with local art displays

STAGE II
COLLECT DATA & ANALYZE

STAGE I
PREPARATION

STAGE II
COLLECT DATA & ANALYZE

STAGE III
DEVELOP GOALS & ACTION PLANS

STAGE IV
IMPLEMENT & MONITOR

STAGE II: COLLECT DATA & ANALYZE

INTRODUCTION

There are five market analysis steps for a thorough analysis.

Three, collect information about current and potential businesses in the community and highlight the goods and services:

1. Building & Business Inventory
2. Business Mix & Location Analysis
3. Business Owners Survey

Two, collect data about current and potential customers for the downtown:

4. Point of Origin Survey
5. Resident Survey

Optional but recommended, is to include any historical documentation.

DOWNTOWN MARKET ANALYSIS

The market analysis stage generates data that is as important for planning physical improvements and for marketing and promotions for new business development.

To highlight, the Business Owner Survey includes questions about plans for renovation or expansion as well as interest in joint marketing with other business while the Resident Survey includes questions on the adequacy of parking and safety, walkability and what type of events or business would bring them downtown.

Stage II generally takes four to six months to complete. The Building and Business Inventory should be completed first. It is a critical foundation for a variety of subsequent tasks.

BUILDING AND BUSINESS INVENTORY

INTRODUCTION

The building and business Inventory compiles information on all the buildings and businesses in the downtown. The inventory provides baseline information on the downtown area while informing the downtown businesses about the revitalization process underway.

It provides a number of benefits:

- It acts as a basic contact management system by centralizing all the contact information for the downtown businesses and building owners. This can facilitate effective communication throughout the downtown revitalization process;
- The information can be used to promote local businesses by creating a business directory for print or online publication;
- It provides up-to-date statistics that can be used to market and describe the health of the downtown to the community. These statistics could include the number of businesses, number of people employed, and the current vacancy rate;
- It can also assist realtors, site selectors and entrepreneurs in identifying available properties in the downtown; and
- It provides a means of documenting important heritage and physical design features located in the downtown.

HOW TO CREATE A BUILDING & BUSINESS INVENTORY

There are eight steps in creating the inventory.

STEP 1: DETERMINE THE INFORMATION TO BE COLLECTED

The following information may be collected for the Building and Business Inventory:

- A unique ID number
- Business name and Business description
- Contact information and Website
- Address
- Year opened / Year closed
- Number of employees (full, part-time and seasonal)

- Building name (if relevant or for historical data)
- Size-sales and total building space in square feet
- Building ownership (lease vs. own)
- Lease expiry, if applicable
- Name of building owner
- Building owner contact information

Other information that could be collected includes:

- Number of stories
- Assessed value of building
- Number of residential units (if any)
- Heritage designation
- Zoning information

STEP 2: DEVELOP THE BUILDING & BUSINESS INVENTORY DATABASE

The following factors need to be taken into account when determining the software format for your inventory database:

- The number of businesses and buildings in the downtown - i.e., the number of records that you need to maintain
- The amount of information that you will collect about each business and building - i.e., the number of variables
- Computer skills of staff and volunteers
- Computer programs and resources available to your organization

If you already have a database of downtown business and building owners, this approach might just add additional information. The working group should review the inventory template to ensure that all relevant data is collected.

STEP 3: ENTER DATA FROM OTHER SOURCES

If possible, add data from other sources to your inventory before you start collecting new data. Examples include building owner information from municipal assessment rolls, and/or business owner

information from the Board of Trade. Using this existing data would shorten the time to complete the inventory.

STEP 4: CREATE DATA COLLECTION FORMS FOR EACH BUSINESS

A data collection form will assist in a consistent approach to capturing information for each building and business in your downtown and mitigate the need to re-collect any missing information. The data collection form should be accompanied by a letter asking for participation, providing instructions, and outlining how the information will be used. This will help increase response rates. Highlight what information will be released publicly and what data will be used internally by your organization.

STEP 5: COLLECT INVENTORY DATA

It is important that you obtain information from every business.

Hand delivering the collection form to business owners/managers and asking them to fill it out provides an opportunity to meet business owners and explain how the information will be used. The business owner can fill out the form while you wait, or the form can be left with the business owner to be completed within two weeks. Follow-up with the businesses may be required if the form is left.

A second option if resources are not available is to hire a temporary trained data collector to collect data by conducting short interviews with business owners/managers.

STEP 6: ENTER COLLECTED DATA.

Once collected, the data needs to be entered into the building and business inventory database. After all the data has been entered – print and proofread the inventory for errors or missing information.

STEP 7: PUBLISH THE BUILDING AND BUSINESS INVENTORY.

Publishing the inventory can be an effective means of marketing existing downtown businesses. Directories can be published in hard copy and digitally. This is an initiative that the Cochrane Board of Trade has been wanting to complete, so there is an opportunity for volunteers to do the work.

The inventory also serves as a source for other information to attract new business and entrepreneurs including:

- Square footage of retail, office or public space located in the business district area
- Properties for sale or rent
- Indicators of retail dynamics – tenant mix of the downtown, vacancy rates, etc.

STEP 8: UPDATE WHEN CHANGES ARE KNOWN

The building and business inventory is a “live” document and system that needs to be reviewed and updated at a minimum, every six months.

BUSINESS MIX & LOCATION ANALYSIS

INTRODUCTION

A Business Mix and Location Analysis identifies the downtown's current function(s), its commercial structure, and potential business opportunities. The Business Mix and Location Analysis incorporates two different components:

1. **Commercial Structure Analysis –** businesses are classified based on consumer behaviour
2. **Location Analysis –** analyzes the locations of business types in the community.

COMMERCIAL STRUCTURE ANALYSIS

This analysis describes the current function of the downtown and provides the following benefits:

- It increases the understanding of the downtown's current retail and service functions — who does it serve, who can it serve, how accessible is it
- It assists in identifying physical design opportunities and serves to highlight how the commercial function relates to such considerations as pedestrian movement, traffic patterns, and parking issues
- It aids in economic development activities by highlighting potential business clusters or niches that exist in the downtown

CLASSIFYING BUSINESSES

As part of the Commercial Structure Analysis, each business in the downtown is classified in three different ways:

- Commercial category
- Consumer classification
- Price of goods rating

COMMERCIAL CATEGORY

There are five commercial categories that reflect the nature of the business:

1. Retail
2. Service
3. Food and Entertainment
4. Other
5. Vacant

CONSUMER CLASSIFICATION

The consumer classification is based on consumer purchasing behaviour:

- Convenience purchases
- Comparison purchases
- Destination purchases
- Food and entertainment purchases
- Public services

A business is classified based on the activity that represents more than 50% of its sales.

Consumer Classification System			
Classification	**Description**	**Location Characteristics**	**Examples**
Convenience Purchases	♦ Frequent purchases ♦ Impulse purchases ♦ Minimum effort required ♦ Nearby	Businesses should: ♦ Be located near major hubs ♦ Be easily accessible ♦ Require short-term parking	Retail – grocery store Service – bank
Comparison Purchases	♦ Frequent purchases but less on impulse ♦ Businesses visited ♦ to compare price and selection	♦ Good if businesses are located relatively close together (pedestrian-friendly)	Retail – clothing store Service – hair stylist
Destination Purchases	♦ Infrequent purchases, more expensive, require greater thought beforehand ♦ Willing to travel farther as distance is less important ♦ Purchases are kept for a long period ♦ Comparisons are made with respect to the merchandise's ♦ appearance, quality, price, style, and the need for it	♦ Businesses should not be located too close together, so that other businesses benefit from their ♦ drawing power ♦ Long-term parking required	Retail – furniture store Service – lawyer
Food & Entertainment Purchases	♦ Goods consumed on-site	♦ Provide atmosphere ♦ Bring vibrancy, activity and noise into the downtown	Coffee shop or theatre

PRICE OF GOODS RATING

The price of goods rating is based on the average price of goods sold by a business compared to other similar businesses within or slightly outside the region. This analysis assists in identifying the market that currently serves the downtown and potential opportunities to attract new customers to the downtown.

HOW TO CONDUCT A COMMERCIAL STRUCTURE ANALYSIS

There are three steps in conducting a Commercial Structure Analysis.

STEP 1: TRAIN VOLUNTEERS TO CONDUCT THE COMMERCIAL STRUCTURE ANALYSIS

Volunteers should be trained on the classification, ratings and any other information the Town has determined to be relevant data.

STEP 2: COLLECT DATA

Divide the downtown into different areas. For each area, assign teams of two people to walk and classify all businesses.

STEP 3: ANALYZE THE RESULTS

Once the teams have completed their assigned areas, results are provided to the Coordinator to record for analysis.

BUSINESS OWNER SURVEY

The Business Owner Survey collects information on the attitudes and opinions of business owners in the downtown. It measures current business needs, marketing and sales information, and perceptions of the downtown. Business owners' opinions about the current state of the downtown and their hopes for its future, contribute to the revitalization plan.

The Business Owner Survey provides a number of benefits:

- Provides an opportunity for the businesses to become involved and have their voice heard in the downtown revitalization process
- Help build trust between the Town and existing businesses
- Identifies issues faced by downtown businesses and developing strategies in response to those issues, can help retain, expand or attract downtown businesses
- Identifies new retail and service business opportunities that would complement existing downtown businesses
- Gauges the willingness of businesses to participate in marketing and promotion activities for the downtown – e.g., cooperative advertising, or special events.

Both the Building and Business Inventory and the Business Owner Survey ask questions of the business operators. The difference is that the Building and Business Inventory collects basic information on all the businesses and properties located in the downtown. It provides a foundation for describing and understanding your downtown. The Business Owner Survey, on the other hand, asks more detailed and in-depth questions about the businesses in the downtown.

It is recommended that both surveys, Building/Business Inventory and Business Owner Survey be combined into one survey for efficiency.

HOW TO CONDUCT A BUSINESS OWNER SURVEY

STEP 1: DETERMINE THE TYPE OF INFORMATION TO BE COLLECTED

Surveys should be limited to questions that will deliver useful information for the downtown revitalization process.

STEP 2: SELECT THE SURVEY TECHNIQUES

Many techniques can be used to gather information from business owners.

- In-person Interviews – recommended for greatest impact and completion
- Online Survey – doesn't necessarily provide full participation and may require a lot of follow-up
- Focus Groups

STEP 3: DESIGN YOUR SURVEY

The most successful surveys communicate a clear purpose relevant to respondents, are easy for individuals to understand, and can be completed efficiently regardless of the technique used.

STEP 5: PRMOTE THE SURVEY.
STEP 6: CONDUCT THE SURVEY.
STEP 7: COMPILE & ANALYZE THE RESULTS
STEP 8: REPORT RESULTS & RECORD ON ANNUAL REPORT CARD.

RESIDENT SURVEY

The Resident Survey collects information on the attitudes and opinions of community residents about the downtown and about the desired future for the downtown.

The Resident Survey is open to everyone in the community. It is critical to obtain the opinions of residents who do not visit the downtown as this will guide you on increasing the appeal and creating a destination of the downtown where everyone will want to visit.

BENEFITS OF CONDUCTING A RESIDENT SURVEY

- It provides an opportunity for all members of the community to become involved and have their voices heard in the downtown revitalization process
- It assists with economic development efforts for the downtown by identifying new retail and service businesses and special events that residents would like to see
- It helps guide physical design improvements by identifying areas of the downtown that residents would like to see improved

Types of surveys:

- Phone Interview Survey
- Print Survey & Online Surveys
- Focus Groups

STAGE III
DEVELOP GOALS & ACTION PLANS

STAGE I
PREPARATION

STAGE II
COLLECT DATA & ANALYZE

STAGE III
DEVELOP GOALS & ACTION PLANS

STAGE IV
IMPLEMENT & MONITOR

STAGE III: DEVELOP GOALS & ACTION PLANS

INTRODUCTION

Stage III requires a balance between action planning, facilitating the process and executing the actions. This stage begins with the sharing of data from Stage II with the project Management Committee/Steering Board and with Council.

SHARE STAGE II DATA RESULTS

Share results with the Management Committee/Steering Board first and scheduling a second session with Council. Sharing results with Council is recommended through closed session.

There will be mixed reactions about the statistics that are brought forward. Questioning and skepticism is healthy as long as there is discussion on the relevance of the findings rather than rejecting all the results without reason.

Presenting the data is not about making recommendations about the course of action the community should follow. The data is being presented so that community leaders can make informed decisions about actions for moving forward.

ACTION PLANS & GOALS

After presenting the data and identifying common themes from leadership, you will have common understanding of the issues that the action plan must address.

To support the development of a realistic and achievable goals, the action plan must include the following segments:

Market Penetration – achieving growth with existing business by leveraging existing downtown strengths. Consider any number of the following actions:

- Introduce a downtown loyalty program
- Market the downtown to more people within the District of Cochrane
- Launch cooperative advertising initiatives
- Create special promotions to encourage more people to shop downtown

New Business Development – develop targeted marketing campaigns to attract businesses in specific sectors or industries that align with the town's economic goals and community needs.

- Streamlined permitting processes
- Entrepreneurial and new business support services and incentives
- Mixed-use development

THE ACTION PLAN

The action plan becomes the community's blueprint for the downtown revitalization project for the next two to three years.

Building consensus between the Management Committee/Steering Board and Council is a key task. It also enables the Management Committee/Steering Board to establish responsibilities for completing actions and providing regular reporting to Council.

An example to help build consensus and prioritize actions:

LINKING GOALS FOR EFFECTIVE ECONOMIC, MARKETING & DESIGN OUTCOMES

For the purpose of this example, let us say a number of different findings are pointing to young families as an issue/opportunity for the downtown:

- The Resident Survey indicated that families with two working parents perceive downtown shopping hours as a barrier, and consequently this consumer segment shops primarily in a nearby community's shopping centre on evenings and weekends.
- The technical review meeting highlighted that there is a significantly higher proportion of children in the trade area than in the County as a whole.

This information was reported at the sharing assessment results meeting and is listed as a key observation.

- The community design workshop identified that narrow sidewalks need to be addressed and that existing street curbs present accessibility issues for strollers and wheelchairs. Further, no play areas exist in the downtown park.
- The long list of potential business opportunities incorporated one or two that could be related to young families — e.g. a desire for a children's clothing store from the Resident Survey and the absence of any local day-care service based on findings from the Business Mix Analysis.

Armed with this kind of insight, several members of the Management Committee come up with ideas to promote the goal of making the downtown a family-friendly place. They suggest a couple of novel and practical ways for turning around this weakness in the downtown. One suggests that the BIA ask all merchants to extend Thursday night shopping hours and coordinate promotions so that at specified times, all retailers display the products available for kids. Another member of the Committee sug- gests that their local church and Sunday-school rooms may make a great place for a day care.

With this goal and these actions now in mind, information is recorded that indicates how each goal can be achieved through the identified actions.

When this work is completed, you will have the material you need to write the Strategic Plan for your downtown inclusive of the identified actions. As an example, "creating a family- friendly downtown" would be identified as one goal in the draft Strategic Plan and the actions that the Committee has suggested to achieve it would be pursued as follows: the economic development committee can be mandated to explore those business ideas that will make the downtown a more attractive shopping experience for young families; the marketing committee can tackle the required promotions; and the physical improvements committee can be asked to work with the service clubs on the park play-equipment issue.

Example of Goals with supporting actions to consider:

Goal 1 – Increase Spending by Employees Who Already Work Downtown

1. Action "Economic Development" – encourage businesses to provide downtown "bonus bucks" to those who already work downtown
2. Action "Marketing & Promotion" – launch a lunchtime promotion such a networking event/business mixer
3. Action "Physical Improvements" – create a space for outdoor lunch-hour activities/ performances

Goal 2: Attract More "Young Family" Shoppers

1. Action "Economic Development" – attract sports equipment retailer, children's consignment store, daycare or youth centre
2. Action "Marketing & Promotions" – host "kid-friendly" events such as toddler "trick or treat" event
3. Action "Physical Improvement" – stroller-friendly curbs and sidewalks, streetscape artwork for family photo-ops

An **action planning worksheet** can assist to breakdown the actions identified for each goal into manageable and achievable tasks.

- **Goal**
- **Activity (The What) –** the action identified to respond to the goal/objective
- **Task/Description/Process (The How) –** individual tasks and activities that need to take place in order to complete the action(s)
- **Responsibility (The Who) –** the individuals or groups that will carry out and complete the tasks
- **Timeline (The When) –** when the tasks begin and when they need to be completed
- **Resources (The What) –** any monetary and in-kind resources required, or volunteers required
- **Evaluation (How Do We Know the Goal Has Been Achieved) –** the criteria that will determine if the objective has been achieved

PRIORITIZING THE GOALS & ACTIONS

Consider the following to assist in prioritizing actions to ensure achievements and progress is being made:

1. **Value –** Will the action contribute to meeting the agreed-upon goals
2. **Appropriateness –** Is the action consistent with the downtown vision
3. **Feasibility –** Is the action practical, i.e. people and financial resources
4. **Acceptability –** Is the action acceptable to Council, community, and other stakeholders?
5. **Cost-Benefit –** Will the action lead to sufficient benefits for the downtown and for the community to justify the costs in time and resources
6. **Timing –** Is it achievable considering competing demands and external factors

Just because a goal and/or action is costly, or complex doesn't mean it should not be included – it may take a longer time to achieve but may also have significant and concrete benefits as well as ensuring the project is sustained during times of change. A balanced mix of quickly achievable actions as well as those that will take longer to realize, ensures progress beyond the initial term of Council.

COMMUNICATION – SHARE THE ACTION PLAN, SHARE THE WORK, & SHARE THE SUCCESS

Sharing the action plan, sharing the work, and ultimately sharing the success are foundational principles for driving forward any downtown revitalization project. The action plan serves as more than just a blueprint; it becomes a dynamic vehicle for effectively communicating the vision, goals, and strategies of the revitalization effort to the entire community.

Through transparent and widespread dissemination of the action plan, community members are not only informed but also empowered to actively participate in the revitalization journey. By sharing details of the plan, including timelines, objectives, and proposed actions, community members gain a clear understanding of the collective endeavor ahead.

Moreover, the action plan serves as a rallying point, inspiring individuals to contribute their time, resources, and expertise towards the shared goal of downtown revitalization. It becomes a catalyst for volunteerism, encouraging community members to step forward and take ownership of specific tasks or initiatives within the broader project framework.

In essence, sharing the action plan ignites a sense of ownership and belonging within the community, fostering a collaborative spirit that is essential for driving meaningful change. By inviting individuals to

actively engage in the implementation process, the action plan transforms from a mere document into a living, breathing roadmap towards revitalization.

As volunteers step forward to lend their support, the workload is distributed among many, increasing resources and fostering a sense of collective responsibility. This shared workload not only accelerates progress but also cultivates a deeper sense of camaraderie and cooperation within the community.

Ultimately, as some results begin to materialize, the success of the revitalization project is celebrated by all and continues to move forward. Whether it's the unveiling of a renovated public space, the launch of a community event, or the revitalization of local businesses, every milestone achieved becomes a testament to the power of collaboration and community-driven action.

Communicating and celebrating milestones and the completion of actions will continue to build and maintain momentum around the revitalization activities and will potentially attract additional support and contributions.

STAGE IV
IMPLEMENT & MONITOR

STAGE I
PREPARATION

STAGE II
COLLECT DATA & ANALYZE

STAGE III
DEVELOP GOALS & ACTION PLANS

STAGE IV
IMPLEMENT & MONITOR

STAGE IV: IMPLEMENT & MONITOR

INTRODUCTION

This section provides tips on how to implement the Action Plan by creating an effective work plan and establishing a process for ongoing monitoring and includes:

- An Implementation Work Plan Template
- Benchmark measures to track and communicate progress
- Ontario resources for guidance on common types of activities your community may have decided to pursue, such as establishing a Business Improvement Association (BIA).

This section also offers guidance to enhance the business mix in the downtown by implementing two key actions: (1) retaining existing businesses, and (2) identifying and developing new business. This two-pronged approach highlights the fact that strengthening existing businesses is every bit as important as attracting new investment when it comes to ensuring the economic vitality of a downtown.

KEYS TO SUCCESS – ARE YOU READY?

Chances of success for communities preparing to move forward with a 3 to 10 year downtown revitalization plan are significantly enhanced if:

- A full-time Coordinator leading the revitalization effort has been hired
- A Management Committee/Steering Board has been established
- Dedicated sub-committees have been identified
- The Coordinator has completed the market analysis and market position of the downtown
- The Management Committee/Steering Board along with Council has responded to any red-flag issues identified during the Business Owner Survey (Stage II)
- There is a positive track record of communications, collaboration, and credibility with downtown business/property owners
- There is a communications workplan as a strategic action item for consistent engagement with the whole community for the revitalization effort

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR

It is recommended that the Economic Development Director leads Business Retention and Development. The Director should recruit three to four volunteers who are objective, think strategically, enjoy problem solving, are community minded and can see the big picture). Ideal volunteers would have skills and experience in small business development, lead generation, sales techniques, and/or marketing.

EXISTING BUSINESSES

There are a number of important reasons why retaining and strengthening existing businesses should be an integral component of a downtown economic development strategy:

- Every business retained in the downtown means one less vacancy to fill
- It is usually much less expensive to retain and improve existing businesses than to attract new businesses
- The loss of existing businesses may impart the impression that it is difficult to thrive as a downtown business
- Losing one store, and its associated customer base, might put other stores selling complementary products/services at risk
- Strong downtown businesses support the attraction of new businesses - success breeds success.

UNDERSTAND YOUR STRENGTHS – IDENTIFY BUSINESSES KEY TO THE SUCCESS OF DOWNTOWN COCHRANE

While it may be desired to provide equal assistance to every business in the downtown, the reality is that even though well intentioned, it might be unrealistic to address every individual need of every downtown business. it is important to focus efforts to support those businesses that are deemed to be most critical to the current and future success of the downtown, i.e. accessibility, services needed by and for the community. Using the downtown market position as a reference point, consider:

- Long-standing businesses in the community
- New businesses with growth potential
- Businesses that serve a cultural or ethnic group
- Businesses that serve downtown residents
- Unusual businesses that add character to the district
- Businesses, existing or new, that create traffic to the downtown – destination

OFFER TRAINING/SEMINARS/PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Enhancing the capacity of downtown business owners through the provision of relevant, business-related seminars is an excellent way to support and strengthen businesses in the downtown. Seminars can take on a variety of themes (business planning, marketing, accounting, financing, human resources, etc.) depending on the needs of the business owners. The Cochrane Board of Trade is a great partner to advance and take ownership of this action.

MONITOR THE HEALTH AND PERFORMANCE OF DOWNTOWN BUSINESSES

Downtown business retention should be a proactive, rather than a reactive process. The intent here is to identify, as soon as possible, businesses that are either experiencing difficulty, or that are considering relocating outside the downtown. By identifying such businesses early enough in the process, the Economic Development Director can work with the business owner to address concerns and retain the business in the downtown.

CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT CONDUCIVE TO BUSINESS INVESTMENT IN THE DOWNTOWN

Downtown areas need to recognize and overcome both perceived and real barriers to business investment in the district.

The Economic Development Director should understand these barriers, both perceived and real, and work with the Management Committee/Steering Board and Council to minimize them through financial or organizational incentives. The most valuable work is to help existing (and often struggling) businesses find opportunities for growth and expansion.

Incentives could include:

- Technical assistance including market and feasibility analysis, business plan development or information on regulations, advertising opportunities and physical design assistance
- Assistance with negotiating and leasing of space
- Financial assistance available through the Community Improvement Plan (CIP) for building improvements, façades, accessibility improvements
- Downtown-wide marketing and promotions assistance to individual businesses
- An effective business-to-business networking system (Board of Trade)
- Business incubators to help establish businesses and provide them with space, common services, networking, and mentoring advice (Board of Trade)

IDENTIFY & DEVELOP NEW BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

This section describes the first step of a two-step process: 1) how to narrow a long list of prospects down to a short list and 2) an optional, more involved stage of conducting a feasibility assessment for each short-listed business opportunity through the creation of a pro forma budget. Step 2 is as indicated "optional" as is often involves the need to hire a consultant or a short-term project analyst to complete the pro-formas for the business prospects.

Both the short-listing and feasibility assessment seek to demonstrate the market potential for prospective new downtown business.

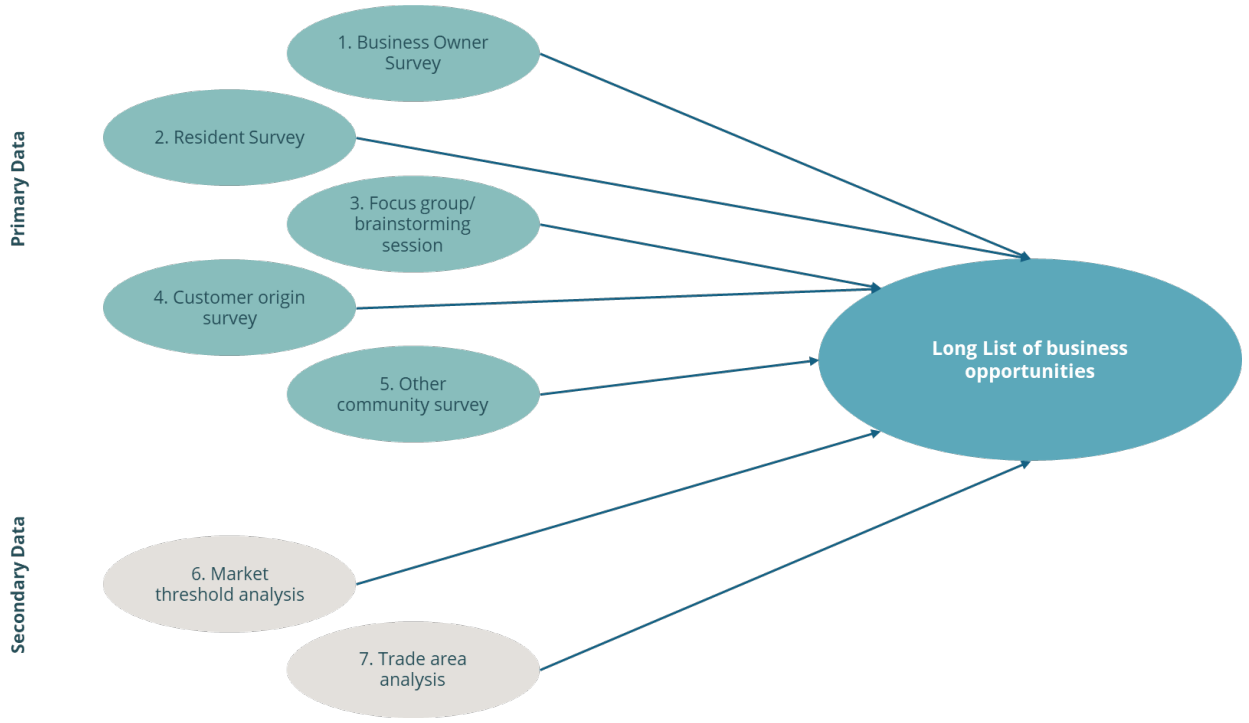
SHORT-LISTING BUSINESS PROSPECTS

There are two central tasks to short-list business prospects:

1. Assemble a long list of business prospects from several sources and consider unique, niche possibilities.

2. Filter the long list down to create a short list of business prospects that meet certain criteria such as wants/needs of the community, increase traffic to the downtown, be a possible long-term anchor, have the ability to navigate regulatory requirements efficiently and demonstrate agility in establishing their presence within the community, ensuring timely integration into the downtown revitalization efforts.

Sources for Creating the "Long List" of Business Prospects



CREATING THE SHORT LIST

Criteria must be set for assessing which business opportunities from the long list will make it to the short list. Criteria to consider:

- Wants/needs of the community
- Compatibility and/or complementarity with existing downtown business
- Niche or specialty
- Have the ability to navigate regulatory requirements efficiently and demonstrate agility in establishing their presence within the community
- Space availability and options - appropriate square footage, zoning, and access, etc.

Business retention and development is an ongoing process. Retaining and developing key businesses is a core focus of successful downtown revitalization. In the long run, it is part of the day-to-day work of the Economic Development Director that will produce the vibrant downtown that Cochrane desires.

Through nurturing relationships with key downtown stakeholders and by maintaining a comprehensive retention and development approach the Town will be well positioned to deliver on the economic development goals for the community.

BENCHMARKING & MONITORING THE DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION PROJECT

Monitoring progress is integral to successful downtown revitalization.

1. It demonstrates accountability to organizations and/or granting bodies individuals funding the downtown revitalization initiative.
2. It demonstrates accountability to the volunteers who contribute their time to the downtown revitalization initiative. Sustaining volunteer enthusiasm and commitment is always a challenge. Volunteers are more likely to stay engaged and committed to the project if they can identify tangible results for their efforts.
3. As the project unfolds, it will be easier to attract new sources of funding and volunteers if you successes are documented and communicated broadly.
4. It provides rationale to adjust or change tactics/strategies if targets are not being met
5. It provides the business case for long-term commitment during times of Council or Administration changes

6. It forces you to celebrate accomplishments. The downtown revitalization process is intensive, and effective monitoring provides reasons to celebrate the work throughout the process. In doing so, it sustains the enthusiasm of all stakeholders including staff, volunteers, funding agencies, and members of the community at large.

WHAT TO MONITOR, HOW OFTEN, & WHERE TO FIND THE DATA?

The list of ideas provided here gives plenty of options to consider, but it doesn't cover everything. Trying to use and report on every single item would take up a lot of time that is better spent on executing important downtown revitalization tasks. Instead, use this as a menu of options. The Management Committee/Steering Board and the Coordinator should select measures that make the most sense and are best suited to the actual goals for Cochrane's Downtown Revitalization project.

Suggested measures for monitoring have been organized into the following:

- Perceptions of downtown
- Economic Development
- Leadership and Management
- Marketing and Promotions
- Physical Improvements

Choice of measures should reflect a cross-section of indicators selected from these categories.

PERCEPTIONS OF DOWNTOWN

This section deals with qualitative assessments of the downtown by three major stakeholders: business owners in the downtown; residents of the community; and visitors to the community.

Business Owners' Perceptions of the Downtown – this measure assesses their level of satisfaction with the downtown area and their perceptions of changes in levels of business activity. These are valuable indicators for relatively easily assessing the impact of the downtown revitalization efforts. The suggested vehicle for gathering the information is a one-page annual survey administered to all downtown businesses.

Residents' Perceptions of the Downtown – this measure would include indications of the degree to which residents use the downtown area and their perceptions of changes in the downtown. These are seen as highly valuable indicators of the impact of your downtown revitalization efforts and are relatively easy to gather. The suggested vehicles for gathering the information are a one-page annual survey or bi-annual focus groups.

Visitors' Perceptions of the Downtown – this measure support Tourism and includes perceptions of the quality and variety of offerings in the downtown, and the physical appearance of the downtown. At the start of the revitalization process (as indicated in Stage I), and every three years, completing a First Impressions Community Exchange will provide a detailed look at visitors' perceptions of the downtown.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The following measures will offer insight into the economic health of your downtown.

Number of Businesses in the Downtown – measuring the change in the number of businesses in the downtown is one measure of the economic health of the downtown and should be reported bi-annually.

Number of Jobs in the Downtown – changes in the number of jobs (full-time, part- time, seasonal) by sector (retail, professional, government, etc.) is a very valuable measure of the economic vitality of the downtown. Such information is best captured through supplementary monitoring questions asked during an update of the annual survey of businesses.

Average Lease Rates – changes in average lease rates over time (annually) can be an indicator of improving or decreasing economic fortunes within the downtown.

Vacancy Rates – both the absolute vacancy rate and changes in vacancy rates over time (annually) are good indicators of economic vitality in the downtown.

Traveler Accommodations – the number of rooms by type (hotel, motel, B&B), average room rates by type, and occupancy rates by type are three measures of the role downtown plays in supporting the tourism economy.

Number of Patrons in Restaurants – changes in the average number of patrons visiting restaurants over time (annually) and differentiated by day of the week and time of year could also provide insight into the economic vitality of your downtown.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

This offers indicators for assessing the level of engagement of individuals and organizations in downtown activities and events.

The Number of Volunteers Engaged in Downtown Revitalization Activities – indicators include attendance figures for workshops and planning meetings; participation in event-planning activities; and participation in event-delivery activities. Such information is easily gathered through the use of attendance sheets associated with each activity. This information should be recorded and reported on a monthly basis.

The Total Time Commitment (Person-Hours) Made by Volunteers Engaged in Downtown Revitalization Activities – gathered through volunteer time sheets, recorded weekly, but reported on a monthly basis.

The Dollar Value Equivalent of Volunteer Contributions to Downtown Revitalization Activities – this can be determined by multiplying the total person-hours of volunteer time by an appropriate rate of pay (using minimum wage would yield a conservative estimate).

The Number of People Attending Community Presentations Related to the Downtown – this measure indicates community engagement with the downtown. Easy to gather through the use of attendance tallies at community presentations.

The Level of Municipal Resources Dedicated to Downtown Revitalization – this is considered to be very valuable and moderately easy to determine. Possible indicators include the number of municipal staff with a downtown mandate; the level of municipal financial contributions to special events; and other municipal expenditures related to downtown.

The Number of Organizations (Other Than the Municipality & Grants) That Offer Financial Support to Downtown Revitalization Activities – this is highly valuable and moderately easy to gather. The level of funding should be documented and reported.

The Total Value of Financial Support Received from External Granting Sources (Provincial or Federal) – this is a valuable measure that should be easy to gather. The level of funding should be documented and reported.

The Amount & Type of Communications Material Distributed (Print & Digital) – this information is valuable to know to measure effectiveness of investment into communications.

MARKETING & PROMOTIONS

The following offer insight into:

- The scope of promotions focusing on downtown
- The level of participation of downtown businesses in those activities
- The success of those activities and promotions in attracting people to the downtown

The Number of Downtown Special Events

Attendance At Downtown Special Events

The Participation of Vendors at Special Events or Festivals Downtown

The Number of Businesses Participating in Downtown Special Events

The Economic Impact of Special Events on Retailers

The Existence of a Marketing Communications Plan for the Downtown

- Does a communications plan exist? Is the plan current? Are downtown stakeholders aware of the plan — i.e., can they identify the target markets for downtown marketing activities?
- Is there a calendar of downtown events/activities? Is it available on the web? If it is available online, what are the statistics regarding usage?
- Is there a distinctive downtown brand and logo? What percentage of businesses have adopted the logo in their marketing materials, or display the logo in their storefronts?
- This information is very valuable.

The Level of Participation in Joint Marketing Activities – both the number of businesses contributing to joint marketing activities and the aggregate value of their financial contributions to those activities are useful measures.

PHYSICAL IMPROVEMENTS

The following tracks changes to the physical appearance of the downtown area.

Digital Inventory of All Public & Private Spaces/Buildings – digital inventory of the downtown will provide a tangible indication of physical changes within the downtown.

Absolute Number & Dollar Value of Public & Private Investment in Physical Improvements

Changes In Property Assessment – changes in the assessed value of individual properties and in the aggregate assessed value of properties in the downtown can be indicators of physical changes.

Physical Improvement Guidelines – are physical improvement guidelines in place? Are downtown property owners aware of the guidelines?

Policies to Support Reinvestment in Downtown Buildings/Public Spaces

- Are there policies to support reinvestment in the downtown? What programs are in place - e.g., Community Improvement Plans?
- How many applicants took advantage of investment incentives? What was the total dollar value of incentives issued?

With the above factors in mind, choose measures from each category that enable to successfully track downtown revitalization progress. The Management Committee/Steering Board needs to monitor to effectively complete and present the Annual Report Card to Council and the community.

CONCLUSION

As you embark on the journey to revitalize the downtown area, remember that this Downtown Revitalization Toolkit is not just a resource—it's a roadmap to success.

By leveraging the strategies and insights provided, Cochrane has the power to transform the community into a vibrant hub of activity and opportunity. With dedication, creativity, and collaboration, the downtown area can be a destination that residents and visitors alike flock to for its vibrant atmosphere, diverse offerings, and sense of community spirit.

INDIGENOUS ALLY TOOLKIT

TRADITIONAL LANDS & TERRITORIES

This guide owes its existence to the invaluable contributions of those who generously shared their lived experiences, as well as, the essential insights and perspectives provided by the Indigenous community. Their collective wisdom and willingness to share have made this guide possible.

“Allyship extends an invitation for prioritizing the inclusion and representation of Indigenous voices, while actively engaging in decolonization processes and building meaningful relationships with Indigenous people and communities.”

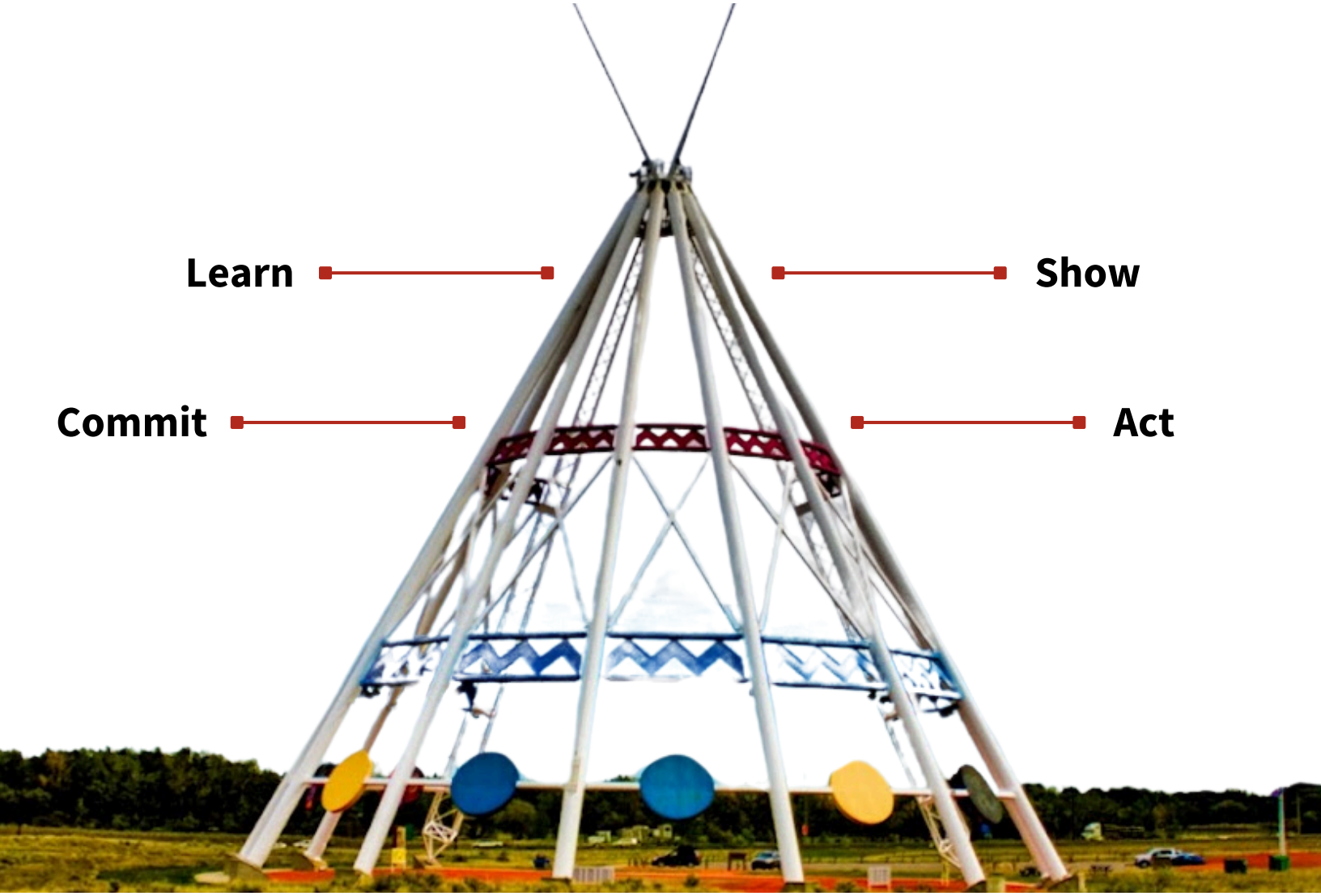
Decolonization is about recognizing and accepting the reality of Canada's colonial history and how that history has paralyzed and subjugated Indigenous Peoples. Decolonization is the process of undoing the effects of colonialism and restoring Indigenous worldviews, culture, and traditions – it’s about revealing, renewal, and rediscovery.

Indigenization is a process of naturalizing Indigenous knowledge systems and making them evident to transform spaces, places, and hearts. Indigenization moves beyond tokenistic gestures of recognition and inclusion to meaningfully transform colonial processes and structures.

Reconciliation is an ongoing process of establishing and maintaining respectful relationships. A critical part of this process involves repairing damaged trust by making apologies, providing individual and collective reparations, and following through with concrete actions that demonstrate real societal change.

ADVANCING RELATIONS

4 Steps to begin the Journey:



This guide serves as a gentle starting point, offering a framework for those uncertain of where to begin their journey. It encourages exploration, adaptation, empowering those to forge their own distinctive path towards allyship.

1. LEARN

LEARN – until we “un-learn, re-learn, and learn” we won’t be able to progress toward establishing meaningful relationships. Embrace the journey of understanding, learning, and unlearning through the transformative power of **reading**, **listening**, and **attending** workshops to foster a deeper appreciation of Indigenous knowledge and the imperative of decolonization.

Initiative

Learn about the history, culture, and issues facing Indigenous peoples through books, documentaries, and online resources.

Attend

Participate in gatherings, workshops, and cultural celebrations organized by the Indigenous community to learn.

2. SHOW

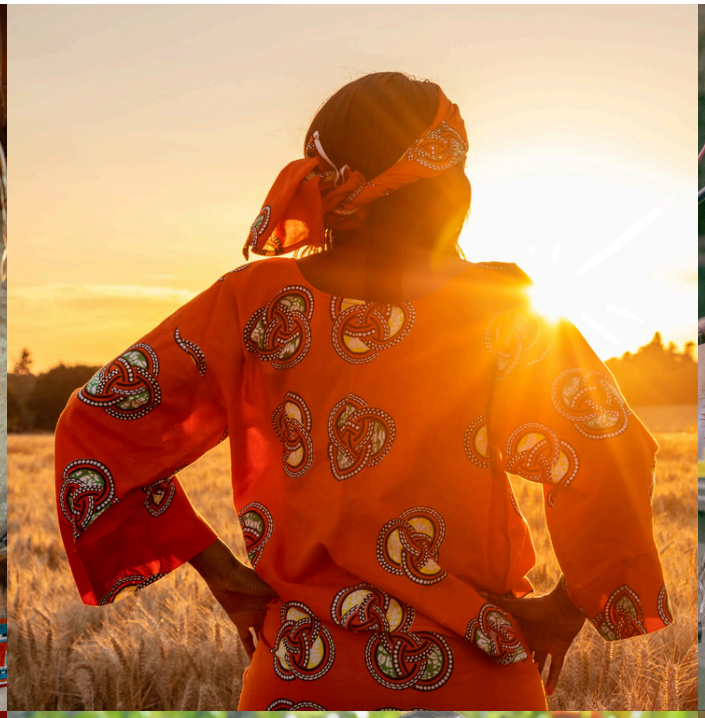
SHOW – visibly demonstrate your commitment through consistent actions, support, and effort.

- *Share* what you have learned with others
- *Showcase* Indigenous art and literature
- *Support* Indigenous-owned businesses by prioritizing and purchasing goods and services from Indigenous-owned businesses whenever possible

3. COMMIT

COMMIT – dedicate resources to prioritize and implement Indigenous wisdom and knowledge into practice.

- *Foster genuine relationships* with Indigenous individuals and communities based on mutual respect, trust, and reciprocity
- *Acknowledge and respect the traditional territories* of Indigenous peoples in all relevant contexts, such as in meetings, at public events, and on websites and publications
- *Provide educational resources and training opportunities* to learn about the history, cultures, and issues of Indigenous peoples



4. ACT

ACT – take tangible steps to challenge colonial structures, actively implement culturally sensitive practices, and promote decolonization in practice.

- Regularly update land acknowledgments to coincide with specific commemorative days throughout the year such as Indigenous Veterans Day, National Day for Truth & Reconciliation, Orange Shirt Day, Red Dress Day, etc.

- Intentionally create space for Indigenization *through*:

  a. *Representation & Collaboration* – ensuring that the Indigenous community is represented for decision-making, governance, and policy

  b. *Education & Training* – incorporating Indigenous perspectives and knowledge into training and educational curricula and materials for staff

- Offer internship programs for Indigenous peoples that provide hands-on experience, mentorship, and opportunities for professional growth and employment

- Invite Indigenous Representation – appoint an Elder in Council at the administration level and/or employ an Indigenous liaison or ally to advise and provide strategic direction and ensure progress

- Share your support through your social media presence - post, recognize, acknowledge days of celebration and remembrance

Red Dress Day – May 5

National Day of Awareness for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+. A day to raise awareness of this ongoing national tragedy, and to honour the thousands of Indigenous women and girls, and two-spirit people who have gone missing or who have been murdered.

National Indigenous History Month/Day – June

June is National Indigenous History Month in Canada, and June 21st is National Indigenous Peoples Day. It's a time to honour the stories, achievements and resilience of Indigenous Peoples and to learn about the unique cultures, traditions and experiences of First Nations, Inuit and Métis.

National Truth & Reconciliation Day – September 30

More colloquially known as Orange Shirt Day, a day to commemorate the history and legacy of the residential school system. A day to honour the resilience, dignity, and strength of survivors as well as intergenerational survivors, and to remember the children who never came home.

National Indigenous Veterans Day – November 8

A day of remembrance that honours the contributions of First Nations, Métis and Inuit people who participated in Canada's military efforts.

THE DRUM – GUIDING THE JOURNEY

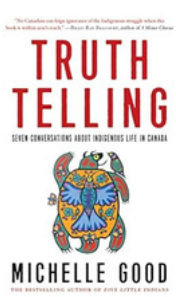
I am the universal heartbeat of the seen and unseen worlds.
I put the drummer in touch with creation itself.
I speak to all people equally and peacefully.
I fulfill and create spiritual, mental, emotional and physical balance.
I am a powerful non-verbal form of peaceful communication.
I am the practice of peace.
I am renewal, re-growth and fulfillment.
I am the pulse of the universe.

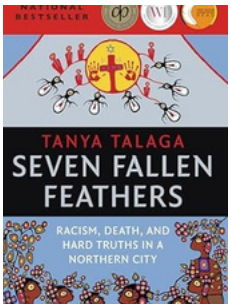
To understand the meaning, dynamics, and significance of drumming, you need to learn about several components of drumming. These include: The Voice of the Drum; Ownership of the Drum and Drum Etiquette; The Magic of Drumming Circles; and Messages from the Drum.

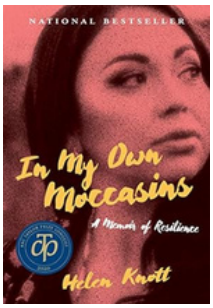
RESOURCES TO SUPPORT YOUR JOURNEY

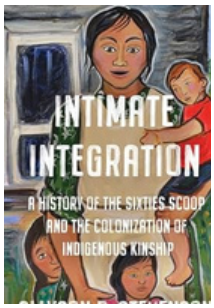
Books

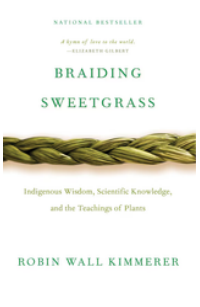
- Truth Telling by author Michelle Good
- Seven Fallen Feathers by author Tanya Talaga
- In My Own Moccasins by author Helen Knott
- Intimate Integration by author Allyson D. Stevenson
- Braiding Sweetgrass by Robin Wall Kimmerer
- Broken Circle by Theodore Fontaine

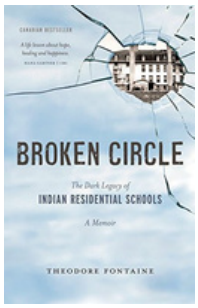












Videos

A Beginner's Guide to Decolonization | Kevin Lamoureux | TEDxSurrey
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GFUwnMHN_T8

Decolonization Is for Everyone | Nikki Sanchez | TEDxSFU
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QP9x1NnCWNY

Blog

Telling Our Twisted Histories | CBC Blog
https://www.cbc.ca/listen/cbc-podcasts/906-telling-our-twisted-histories?cmp=DM_SEM_Listen_Titles

Podcasts

Telling Our Twisted Histories | CBC Podcasts | CBC Listen
Words connect us. Words hurt us. Indigenous histories have been twisted by centuries of colonization. Host Kaniehti:io Horn brings us together to decolonize our minds– one word, one concept, one story at a time.
www.cbc.ca

Movies & Documentaries

- Indian Horse
- Inconvenient Indian
- Taken (the series) Stories of missing and murdered Indigenous women | https://www.takentheseries.com/

RESOURCES TO SUPPORT YOUR JOURNEY

Events & Experiences
Destination Indigenous
https://destinationindigenous.ca/

Share: Social Media
National Indigenous Month and Day for 2024
https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1100100013251/1534874002459
On June 21st, Canadians from all walks of life are invited to participate in the many National Aboriginal Day events that will take place from coast to coast to coast. www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca

Indigenous Organizations

- Assembly of First Nations
- Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami
- Métis National Council
- National Association of Friendship Centres
- Native Women's Association of Canada
- Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada
- Women of the Métis Nation

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DIVERSITY, EQUITY, & INCLUSION: COUNCILS & COMMITTEES TOOLKIT

Table of contents

Introduction

About this toolkit

A note on terminology

Creating, supporting, and maintaining a DEI council

Step 1: Prepare the groundwork

Step 2: Prepare the council charter or terms of reference

Step 3: Recruit and onboard council

Step 4: Launch, act, and communicate

Step 5: Measure, analyze, and adjust

Conclusion

What's next?

Appendix – Are you ready?

Checklist for establishing a DEI council

References

Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion
Centre canadien pour la diversité et l'inclusion

December 2023

www.ccdi.ca

Introduction

About this toolkit

Organizational leaders send a powerful message when they demonstrate a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) that goes beyond rhetoric. One best practice to demonstrate this level of commitment and involvement is by forming and leading a DEI council or committee.

Council and committee members are highly accountable for achieving the organization's diversity goals.[1] They support the development or validation of an organization's diversity strategy by helping to operationalize DEI efforts into the day-to-day workings of the organization.[2 3] As a result, these groups are instrumental in developing strong institutions that put DEI at the forefront of their philosophy, strategic direction, mission, vision, and values.[4]

This toolkit builds on CCDI's 2017 toolkit, "Diversity & inclusion councils". This version, created in 2023, has been updated with recent research and resources to bring fresh perspectives and insights about DEI councils. Additionally, with the aim of making it even easier to develop effective DEI councils, this toolkit is organized into five steps:

1. **Prepare the groundwork**
2. **Prepare council framework and charter**
3. **Recruit and onboard council**
4. **Launch, act, and communicate**
5. **Measure, analyze, adjust**

Each section shares a list of actions to complete and concludes with reflection questions and helpful resources. Not all steps will be relevant or required for every organization. However, we encourage all teams to use this document as a starting point and will highlight areas where smaller teams in particular can integrate specific actions as key takeaways.[5] We also suggest you use the table of contents to locate sections that most align with your organization's needs.

A note on terminology

Although councils and committees perform similar roles, they are two different groups. Diversity councils provide insights and information that are reflected in the organization to accelerate DEI efforts.[6] A diversity committee is a task force of staff members to encourage changes within the workplace to promote the DEI culture.[7] Each group can play a significant role, so it is important to consider what works best for your organization. Since councils are larger and have more power than committees, this toolkit will use the term "council" for the remainder of this document for clarity.

We use the acronym DEI which stands for diversity, equity, and inclusion. Your organization and others may use any number of acronyms including D&I (diversity and inclusion), EDI (equity, diversity, and inclusion), or IDEA (inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility). Your choice of acronym depends on your organization's workforce demographics, geographical location, size, DEI maturity, and goals. In fact, the process of developing your business case and subsequent strategy can be helpful in determining your organization's goals and the most appropriate acronym to describe them.

Creating, supporting, and maintaining a DEI council

Step 1: Prepare the groundwork

It is important to lay a solid foundation for a successful DEI council. Consider your team, business case, and type of council to better understand the purpose of creating one. These elements are the main building blocks for the following stages.

Building a team

Start by putting together a team that is focused on launching the council. This team could include your Chief Diversity Officer or the most senior person in the organization responsible for diversity and inclusion. Ensure the launch team has cross-functional representation and is not solely comprised of DEI or HR employees.[8]

Creating buy in

Prepare a proposed budget and business case for this council to get leadership buy-in or support. The following lists highlight the benefits to your organization, human resources team, and employees to support your argument. However, we encourage you to find additional research that may be more specific to your organization, industry, or location.[9]

Benefits to organizations

- Provide strategic governance and oversight of the operationalization of an organization's DEI strategy.[10]
- Demonstrate visible leadership commitment and accountability for driving DEI throughout the organization.[11]
- Offer focus and strategic direction to workplace initiatives.[12]
- Help build an inclusive workplace culture.[13]
- Assist the company's leadership by becoming a trusted advisor and a resource to help accelerate results.[14]
- Determine appropriate actions to optimize organizational performance that align with its DEI goals.[15] [16]

Benefits to human resources and people managers

- Add an efficient point of contact that represents the entire organization.[17]
- Enable leaders of the strategy to extend their reach across the organization.[18]
- Provide HR with a wide scope of the organization by having all units represented; strategies and initiatives can be tailored to meet the direct needs of the units.[19]

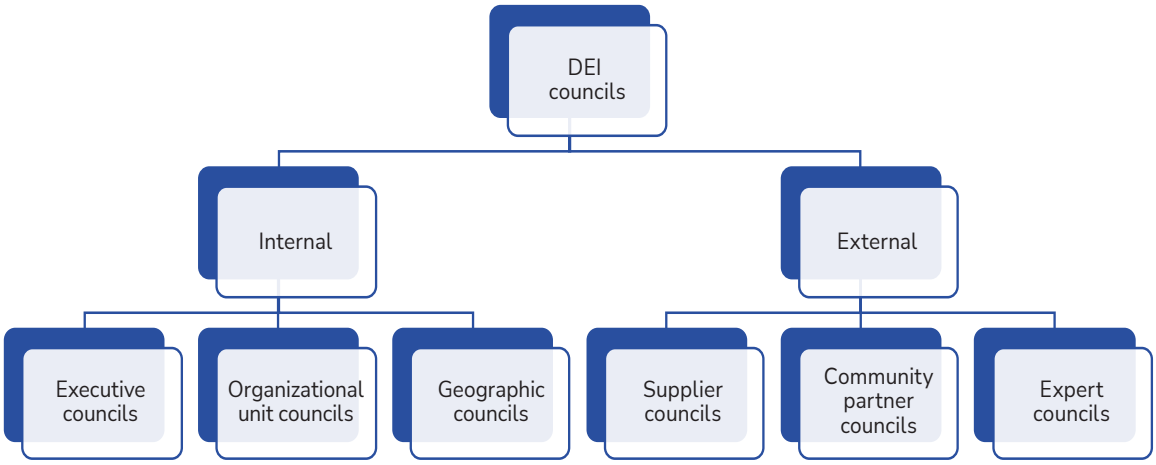
Benefits to employees

- Provide an additional way for employees to raise concerns and give feedback.[20]
- Offer a top down, bottom-up approach to sharing employee feedback about an organization's DEI efforts (e.g., the council listens to employee feedback, then shares feedback directly with leadership and employee-led groups like ERGs).[21]
- Facilitate the development of an inclusive culture where employees feel safe to bring their whole selves to work.

Choosing a type

There are many different types of councils. They vary in membership, reporting structure, vision, mission, goals, and business focus.[22] Therefore, it is important to select the appropriate council to best meet the needs of your organization. Figure 1 (below) is an illustration of some internal and external types.

Figure 1: Types of diversity councils



Types of internal councils

Executive councils

This group is led by a senior leader (often a CEO or executive director) and includes representatives from all organizational units.[23] The council oversees the implementation of the DEI strategy and provides direction for the rest of the DEI councils.[24]

Organizational unit councils

A unit leader, such as a department head, may sponsor a diversity council to ensure the strategy is rolled out throughout their unit. Membership is diverse and can include a mix of job levels, experience, and diversity dimensions including age, gender, race, and disability. This group updates executive leadership on the needs and progress of DEI initiatives within their department.[25]

Geographic councils

These groups represent geographically-specific units – global, national, or local. This is to ensure that the strategy is carried out at the regional level.[26]

Table 1 – Types of internal councils

	EXECUTIVE COUNCIL	DEPARTMENTAL COUNCIL	GEOGRAPHIC COUNCILS
Chair	• Executive Director; • Chief Executive Officer; or • Organizational leader appointed to lead	• Departmental head	• Regional leadership
Co-Chair	• Chief Diversity Officer; • Chief Human Resources Officer; or • Senior HR leader	• Senior diversity leader; or • Human resources	• Senior diversity leader; or • Human resources
Scope/goals	• Provide strategic direction for DEI initiatives	• Implement the DEI strategy at the unit level, and report to the executive council on progress	• Implement the DEI strategy at the regional level, and report to the executive council on progress
Membership composition	• Fixed members: Executive Director, Chief Executive Officer, organizational leader, Chief Diversity Officer, Chief Human Resources Officer, senior HR leader, etc. • Rotating members are appointed based on the focus of the strategy.	• Fixed members: Departmental leadership • Rotating members are appointed	• Fixed members: National, regional, or local leadership • Rotating members are appointed

Types of external councils

Supplier diversity councils

These councils facilitate the growth of certain businesses, by connecting them to procurement opportunities with institutions committed to a diverse and inclusive supply chain. Membership in this type of council generally includes a partnership of employees, vendors, suppliers, and potentially government representatives.[27] Supplier diversity councils can be internal or external to the company and may vary greatly in structure from a formalized council to a supplier diversity initiative.[28] Examples of external supplier diversity councils include the **Canadian Aboriginal Minority Supply Council**, **Canada's LGBT+ Chamber of Commerce**, and the **Inclusive Workplace Supply Council of Canada**. These groups offer access to certifications, directories, and other resources to increase your supply chain diversity.

Small organizations

Joining supplier diversity councils can be a great way to leverage outside resources to help your company bring DEI into additional elements.

Community partner councils

These councils aim to build relationships with their community partners to gain insight into their needs.[29] The focus could range from seeking knowledge on a specific topic, recruitment efforts, and responding to concerns.[30]

Expert councils

This group provides guidance and support to organizations regarding best practices in DEI, either by correspondence or through meetings.[31] Members consist of experts from many different sectors like government, academia, business, or non-profit.[32]

Table 2 – Types of external councils

	SUPPLIER DIVERSITY COUNCIL	COMMUNITY PARTNERS COUNCIL	EXPERT COUNCIL
Scope/goals	• Connect organizations to a diverse and inclusive supply chain	• Learn about the needs and concerns of community partners	• Share best practices in DEI
Membership composition	• Key leaders from organization's DEI and procurement functions and main suppliers	• Select community members	• Government, academic, business, non-profit etc.

Decide on the guiding principles

Now that you have support from leadership and have chosen a type, you will need to create guiding principles to direct your decisions, planning, and practices. Articulate the mission, vision, values, and mandate of the council while being cognizant of its type. It is recommended that you call this a draft version and engage the newly formed council in reviewing and revising.[33]

Reflection questions

- Who are potential council members in your organization?
- How will your team create "buy-in" from leadership?
- What type of council will best serve your employees?
- How will your team decide the mission, vision, value and mandate of your council?

Helpful resources

Bilingual

- **Making the case for diversity, equity, and inclusion (PDF)** / **Plaider en faveur de la diversité, de l'équité et de l'inclusion (PDF)**, Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion

English only

- **5 Steps You Should Take To Build A DEI Team In The Workplace**, Positive Hire
- **7 ways to get exec buy-in for diversity and inclusion work**, Industry Drive
- **How to Craft a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Mission Statement**, Senior Executive
- **Creating a DEI Purpose Statement for your Organization**, LinkedIn

French only

- **Pourquoi un comité EDI est-il indispensable à votre strategie en diversité et inclusion**, URelles
- **4 conseils pour ne pas que votre comité en equité diversité et inclusion stagne**, URelles
- **La création d'un comité EDI en organisation, une étape importante**, Facteur

Step 2: Prepare the council charter or terms of reference

One of the most integral elements of a DEI council is the creation of a charter or terms of reference. When created collaboratively, the charter outlines the ways in which the group agrees to work together to accomplish their goals. By having a shared set of expectations, the charter can be a crucial step in creating accountability. Although not an exhaustive list, your charter may include the following:[34]

- Principal activities
- Meeting frequency and structure
- Communication plan
- Strategic plan
- Budget considerations/fund allocation

Small organizations

For smaller organizations, DEI responsibilities may be assigned to one or a few people, but clarifying responsibilities allows the work to be shared more equitably.

Articulate your goals

Think about, discuss, and articulate the goals of the council. It is recommended to set around three to five goals, and they should be written using the SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Timely) format. It is important to identify specific short-term objectives that can be completed within the year, and long-term objectives that can be completed within the length of a term.[35]

Establish the roles and responsibilities

The effectiveness of the council depends on each member fulfilling their role, so clearly define what is expected of each member.[36] An overview of the roles and responsibilities of council members is shown below in Table 3.

Table 3 – Roles and responsibilities of council members

POSITION	ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES[37]
Chair	Facilitate the effective functioning of the council and ensure that objectives are achieved.
Co-Chair/ Vice Chair	Support the Chair with their responsibilities and acts as the Chair in their absence.
Secretary	Organize and take meeting minutes to provide documentation of council discussions.
Council member	Participate in council meetings and perform other duties, as needed and assigned. **All council members take equal and shared responsibility for the councils work as a whole. Council members can only carry out specific aspects if they are authorized to do so.*

Define the operational guidelines

Operational guidelines are rules, regulations, and policies necessary for the proper organization and administration.[38] Create this document to streamline operations and ensure that your team has a set of standard procedures.

The statements below are an excerpt from the sample operating guidelines created by the Collaborative Leaders Network.[39] These rules encourage mutual understandings between council members to overcome any disagreements during meetings.

- We will listen with care and sensitivity to the full range of all members' interests.
- We will share factual, technical, or scientific information that will help lead to agreements.
- We will not monopolize discussions or dominate the floor.
- We will refrain from disparaging remarks or personal attacks.
- We will remain open to new ideas.

Use these statements as a starting point in creating your own operational guidelines for meetings, decision making, communication, and more.

Reflection questions[40]

- **Membership recruitment plan:** What are the criteria to join? What does membership provide employees?
- **Application processes:** How does someone apply? When does someone apply?
- **Roles and responsibilities:** What are the specific roles and responsibilities of the positions in the previous chart? What will be the decision-making process of the council?
- **Meetings:** How often are meetings held and on which day and week of the month? Will there be a required quorum?
- **Time commitment expectations in the short and long term:** How many hours are council members required to dedicate to this group? How long is a term? How many terms are allowed?

Helpful resources

Bilingual

- **Terms of reference for the Diversity and Inclusion Committee** / **Mandat du Comité pour la diversité et l'inclusion**, Canadian Museum for Human Rights
- **How to create an Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Plan** / **Comment créer un plan d'équité, de diversité et d'inclusion (EDI)**, Government of Canada

English only

- **Four Tips for Creating a DEI Council Charter**, LinkedIn
- **How to Create a Team Charter (Example & Template Included)**, ProjectManager
- **The quick guide to making a team charter**, Miro
- **Diversity and Inclusion Committee Terms of Reference (PDF example)**, Alberta Municipalities

French only

- **Comité Équité, Diversité et Inclusion**, Uqàm

Step 3: Recruit and onboard council

It is important to find the right members for this team, but it is just as important to set them up for success.[41]

Recruit council members

Recruitment can be time-consuming and costly, so take the time to collaborate with others to find suitable candidates.[42] For internal councils, leverage or partner with organizational leadership and HR to identify employees with the interest and skills to support the team. For external councils, tap into DEI organizations (like CCDI) and other networks to widen your candidate pool.

When recruiting DEI council members, leaders may want to consider diversity dimensions.[43] This refers to the differences in your team including, but not limited to: race, ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, economic status, physical abilities, life experiences, and other perspectives that make up individual diversity.[44] These dimensions provide different perspectives and knowledge that can lead to more innovative ideas.[45]

Please note that DEI initiatives often fall on the shoulders of equity seeking groups.[46] Ensure that your team makes a conscious effort to share the workload to prevent burnout of the groups you wish to support.[47]

Design an orientation program

An orientation program is a brief, one-time event that introduces everyone to the organization's approach to DEI.[48] Attendees could include council members, leadership, employees, and stakeholders, and should cover topics like definitions, the organization's DEI business case, strategy, goals, as well as the journey so far.

Small organizations

Use your smaller event to your advantage. This can be an opportunity to establish personal connections with attendees and answer their specific questions.

Onboard the team

Onboarding is the long-term process to integrate council members into their roles.[49] It can be delivered in many formats including: one-on-one training, group training or other customized formats based on what each member needs.[50] Every council is unique, but it may be a good idea to cover the following topics:

- The role of a council
- Accountabilities of council members
- Overview of DEI in the organization
- Operational details including time commitment, frequency of meetings, internal and external events, and inclusive behaviours.

Reflection questions

- What strategies will you use to ensure that your recruitment process is inclusive?
- What are the necessary topics to include in your orientation program?
- Think about some of the best onboarding you have received. What made it so positive?

Helpful resources

Bilingual

- **Easy onboarding tips to make new employees feel welcome** / **Intégration du nouveau personnel: conseils pour réussir l'accueil**, BDC

English only

- **How To Create a New Employee Orientation Program in 8 Steps**, Indeed
- **Why Better Onboarding Is Key To Improved Productivity In 2023**, Forbes
- **Onboarding A New Employee? Follow These 11 Effective Strategies**, Forbes

French only

- **Les 5 clés du recrutement inclusif**, Recruthea
- **Créer un processus de recrutement inclusif en 2023**, Jarvis
- **Bâtir une équipe diversifiée, gage de succès de votre entreprise**, Robert Half

Step 4: Launch, act, and communicate

Although DEI councils vary, there are some elements that are needed for every council to perform optimally. By the time you get to this stage, your council should have addressed the following:

- Support from senior leadership[51]
- Direct link to the overall business strategy[52]
- Reinforcement of the business case for DEI[53]
- Diverse membership[54]
- Clearly communicated goals and outcomes[55]
- A long-term strategy that drives short-term initiatives and activities[56]

If your team has these key success factors, it is ready to be public.

Articulate your launch goals

Launching the council provides visibility of your organization's commitment to DEI. Start by writing down the most important things you want to accomplish from this event.

To support your launch, consider the following questions:[57]

- Why are we hosting this event?
- Who is our audience?
- What do they currently think and what would we like them to think?
- What's the most important thing we can tell them? Why should they believe it?
- What's in it for them? Get some factual support.
- What should be left out of the event?

Promote and market

Plan the promotion and marketing of the launch using the internal and external communications team. Before you start, make sure a budget has been assigned and approved.

Small organizations

For small businesses on a tight budget, a large event may not be feasible. However, consider ways to leverage existing communication channels to mark the launch as a special occasion within the organization, and to highlight actions that will be taken going forward.

Lead and role model

After the event, set an example by completing the goals stated in your charter.[58] Although the steps prior to launch are important in creating a solid foundation, it is much more important to ensure that you are carrying out your strategies to make more inclusive workplaces.[59]

Ensure transparency

Remember to have ongoing communication with both internal and external stakeholders about your progress.[60] Communications teams play an important role in achieving DEI goals. Best practices include incorporating an inclusive lens on all communication, not just messaging specifically about diversity.[61]

When creating messaging, here are some things to keep in mind:

- Leverage internal communication tools like intranets to showcase DEI within the organization.[62] Use it to introduce employees to resources like employee resource groups and employee engagement surveys.
- The organization's external website is often an under-utilized tool. Use it to communicate with prospective employees, clients, and customers about the great work on DEI and build the organization's overall brand.[63]

Engaging with stakeholders

Stakeholders play an integral role in the continued momentum and success of the council.[64] Therefore, it is important to develop messaging that will inform, engage, and encourage participation from them. Consider sharing data and metrics to highlight the need for stakeholders and the impact of their involvement.[65] Table 4 below gives a list of key stakeholders. Tailor your messaging based on the ways they support your team to ensure your communication is always relevant.

Table 4: Stakeholder support

STAKEHOLDER	WAYS TO SUPPORT
Organizational leadership	• Provide financial support. • Advocate for the need of a DEI council. • Include council in executing organizational initiatives.
DEI professionals	• Share information on best practices. • Connect to other stakeholders. • Hold the council accountable to achieve goals.
Employee resource groups (ERGs)	• Highlight insights, needs and concerns of the ERG. • Offer feedback to improve the DEI initiatives.

STAKEHOLDER	WAYS TO SUPPORT
Employees	• Get involved in DEI initiatives. • Share personal experiences to shape DEI strategies.

Reflection questions

- What are the most important things you wish to accomplish with the launch event?
- How will you promote the event? Who will this reach?
- What are the specific ways you will ensure ongoing communication with your stakeholders? (e.g., how often will you be updating each group?)

Helpful resources

Bilingual

- **Inclusive event planning** / **Planification d'événements inclusifs**, Government of Canada

English only

- **How to Successfully Launch a DEI Committee**, Pulsely
- **What is stakeholder communication? (Methods and examples)**, Indeed
- **A Guide To Diversity, Equity And Inclusion In Communications**, Forbes
- **10 Steps to Build DEI Communications Strategy That Works**, Haiilo

French only

- **Nouveau guide sur la communication inclusive**, Université du Québec à Montréal
- **Comment rendre votre événement inclusif ?**, Evenement
- **Ecriture inclusive en entreprise : 10 conseils pour l'adopter**, Infonet

Step 5: Measure, analyze, and adjust

Especially in the DEI field, best practices are always being updated, which is why it is important to monitor your progress. Create metrics so that you can analyze areas that need improvement and adjust as needed .

Measure success

Choose the appropriate metrics for your council to monitor progress, understand any challenges, and create accountability.[66]

It can be challenging to pick the "right" metrics given the complexity of measuring diversity and inclusion.[67] To make this decision easier, we have listed some ways to measure DEI.

Small organizations

Measuring and analyzing data can seem like they are only for big businesses with big budgets. However, in situations where resources are scarce, carefully selected metrics can help determine how to allocate resources wisely in activities that are in line with strategic goals.

Ways to Measure DEI

Theory of change

A theory of change is a series of actions that aim to move your organization from point A to point B.[68] For example, if your organization wants to hire and retain more people from equity seeking groups, actions your organization could take include:

- Creating mentorship programs for underrepresented groups,
- Developing equitable hiring and promotion practices,
- Starting long-term partnerships with professional organizations serving equity seeking groups.

By understanding the steps needed to meet your goal, you can now determine the appropriate metrics. In this case, it could be measuring: the number of employees who use the mentorship program, evaluating the demographics of the talent pool, or the number of partnerships made. The metrics do not necessarily measure the outcome of hiring and retaining people from equity seeking groups for example, but the factors related to its achievement.[69] [70]

Measuring council experience

Gathering information on the experiences of council members can also support the evaluation of the group's success. Document their experience through surveys and interviews to make any adjustments.[71] Consider the following:

- **Composition:** How diverse is your team? What perspectives are missing?[72]
- **Council engagement:** How involved and engaged are council members?[73]
- **Learned behaviour:** What specific inclusive behaviours did they learn and role model after joining the council?[74]
- **Achievement:** What have the council members achieved both personally and professionally by being part of the council? Do they require additional professional development?[75]

Analyze the data

Dedicate time to discuss your metrics. Analyze areas where your team did well and areas that need improvement to help plan your goals and objectives for the next year.

Make adjustments

Make any necessary changes based on conclusions made from your metrics. Ensure that you communicate with your team about the rationale behind these adjustments.[76]

Reflection questions

- How will your team measure success?
- From your metrics, what have you learned?
- What will you do differently?

Helpful resources

English only

- **DEI Metrics: The Key to Building an Effective DEI Program**, TechnologyAdvice
- **7 Metrics to Measure Your Organization's DEI Progress**, Harvard Business Review
- **Understanding DEI Data-Driven Strategy and Key Metrics**, Pulsely
- **6 DEI metrics all organizations should be tracking**, LinkedIn
- **12 Key DEI Metrics To Track For An Inclusive Workplace**, People Managing People

French only

- **Diversité, inclusion, parité... comment s'y retrouver dans les baromètres et indicateurs ?**, Mon entreprise inclusive
- **Comment mesurer la diversité et l'inclusion dans votre entreprise ?**, Manageria
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Conclusion

Councils serve a powerful purpose by becoming a trusted advisor and a resource to help accelerate the results of DEI initiatives throughout the organization. However, they can be a costly and time-consuming group if not used effectively.

Our mandate at the Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion is to assist Canadian employers in creating more inclusive workplaces. We hope that the ideas, strategies, and tools we have provided in this toolkit are valuable and useful in helping you implement or leverage DEI councils and committees in your organization.

What's next?

As your team develops your DEI councils, it is important to know that new trends are always emerging. To stay updated on best practices, continue to educate yourself by reading articles and attending events.

For additional help, **view our other toolkits** to learn more ways to transform your organization's DEI initiatives.

Appendix - Are you ready?

Checklist for establishing a DEI council

This checklist is meant to support your team as you create your DEI council. Consider the following questions to guide your next steps.

A. Leadership commitment

- How committed are your organization's leaders?
- Do you have expertise on DEI internally? Remember, being passionate about DEI is not the same as having expertise and experience in creating a DEI strategy.
- What size is your organization and what is your projected headcount growth for the next year? Council sizes, potential members and meeting cadence will depend on this.

B. DEI objectives

- Do you have a DEI business case or imperative document?
- Do you have a DEI strategy?
- What are your diversity council's objectives?
- Are your objectives practical, realistic, and measurable?
- How will a council further the objectives?

C. Guidelines

- Do your written guidelines and bylaws cover all essential elements of the council?
- How long will the council relationships last?
- What types of issues and concerns are within the scope of the council?
- How much time should the leadership and council volunteers spend?
- What should DEI activities include?
- How much money should your organization spend?

D. Procedures and criteria for creating a DEI council

- What is the time commitment required for council members? How will it work in practice? Be upfront about time commitments, meeting times (especially if it is a global group), expected length of service expected on council, etc.
- What criteria will be used to select leaders and members?
- Will organization leaders select committee members?

E. Leaders and members of the diversity council

- What are the criteria for your ideal Chair and council members? Who do you want to be involved and why?
- What competencies will you look for in potential leaders?
- Who can be members?
- How will leaders be recruited?
- How will members be recruited?
- Will you have term limits for council members?
- What succession planning will you do for when council members leave the council or leave the organization?

F. Council onboarding and development

- How will you onboard and prepare your council for success?
- What will you include in your council training curriculum?
- Who will provide the training?
- When will you provide the training?

G. Marketing the council

- What communications vehicles will you use to market the council?
- Do your materials inform and promote?
- Are your marketing and communications materials designed to attract leaders and members?
- Will you partner with external experts (such as CCDI) on this project?
- How will you launch your program?
- How will you educate your employees and other stakeholders about the council?

H. Evaluation

- How and when will the council be evaluated?
- Who will do the evaluation?
- How will individual experiences and contributions be evaluated?

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ONTARIO COCHRANE
WONDERFULLY UNEXPECTED

SERVICES FOR AN AGING RURAL POPULATION & NORTHERN PERSPECTIVE

RURAL ONTARIO FORESIGHT PAPERS

Services for an Aging Rural Population

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Introduction

Twenty years ago, Health Canada's special Advisor on Rural Health described access to Canadian healthcare services in this way: "If there is two-tiered medicine in Canada, it's not rich and poor, it's urban versus rural" (Wooton, as cited by Laurent, 2002). Two decades later, the rural population in Canada is rapidly aging; the baby boom generation has moved through the population's demographic figures since the second world war, its weight affecting every aspect of social and public policy, including debates about the provision of services (Statistics Canada, 2017). Wooton's concept of two-tier medicine perhaps still rings true today given downsizing and restructuring in rural health care, despite the needs of the aging population, and can be accurately applied to other rural services, especially those relevant for older adults such as housing and transportation (Hanlon & Skinner, in press).

The concern for rural services today is only more timely and relevant as it is no surprise that the rural population is aging. The release of Statistics Canada's (2017) report on age, sex and type of dwelling data from the 2016 Census created an instantaneous ripple effect in national media outlets, citing the anticipated statistic that "for the first time, seniors outnumber children in Canada, as the population experienced its greatest increase in the proportion of older people since Confederation" (Grenier, 2017). This growth is compounded in rural Canada where, although there are some inter-provincial differences, the population is aging more rapidly than in cities (CIHR, 2017).

Rural Canada has experienced considerable social and economic restructuring in the last twenty years, resulting in changes in service availability (Halseth, Markey & Ryser, 2019; Halseth & Ryser, 2006). Indeed, the rural aging literature has long recognized rural communities as often not fiscally equipped to address older people's increasingly complex needs given their population decline, limited fiscal resources and reliance on volunteerism (Keating, Swindle & Fletcher, 2011; Scharf, Walsh & O'Shea, 2016; Skinner & Winterton, 2018). Restructuring has universally been applied in urban and rural environments in Canada, but their impacts have most keenly been felt in rural settings which heavily rely on public sector investment to support primary industry and rural services (Ryser & Halseth, 2010; 2014). Retail, social, health, education, infrastructure and government services, although crucial for maintaining daily activities and quality of life, have gradually begun to be housed in regional urban and metropolitan centres. Under the health service umbrella, restructuring in particular has created service delivery gaps in transportation, mental health services, palliative care and respite care (Halseth, Markey & Ryser, 2019); all of which are essential services for older people (Skinner et al., 2008).

This Foresight Paper aims first to define and describe those rural services that are relevant to an aging population, situating its role as a mediator between the tensions between older people aging in place – when "remaining living in the community, with some level of independence, rather than in residential care" (Davey, Nana, de Joux & Arcus, 2004, pp. 133) – versus being "stuck" in place – wherein older adults seeking to move *from* their homes cannot do so, typically embedded within economic, social, and/or racial disparity (Torres-Gil & Hofland, 2012). Second, the paper provides an overview of four rural services that are especially relevant to and challenging to deliver for older people (healthcare and community support services, housing, transportation and recreation), but also giving case examples of rural Ontario communities demonstrating innovation in response to adversity by successfully addressing these service delivery challenges at the community level. By describing service delivery challenges for older rural populations, we aim to paint a balanced picture of challenges that directly affect older Ontarians in rural communities but also ways in which communities are in some ways able to continue to facilitate an appropriate place to grow older for their citizens.

Services for an Aging Rural Population

Rural areas and populations are often considered under-serviced, that is, lacking the full range of public services such as health care, education and community support. They are also often described as subject to the longstanding deprivation of public infrastructure, most recently in relation to broadband (internet) services that are crucial for social and economic development across Canada today (Hanlon & Skinner, in press). Popular ideals such as social capital, voluntarism and the rural idyll, however, propel a parallel argument that what rural communities and small towns lack in formal services due to restructuring, they make up for in close interpersonal ties and a shared understanding of the notion of community. This conventional wisdom is questioned by key debates within rural health policy, research and practice, especially in relation to seniors' in-home and community care in rural and small-town settings (e.g., Kulig & Williams, 2012; Ryser & Halseth, 2014; Simpson & McDonald, 2017; Skinner et al., 2008).

Popular ideals such as social capital, voluntarism and the rural idyll, however, propel a parallel argument that what rural communities and small towns lack in formal services due to restructuring, they make up for in close interpersonal ties and a shared understanding of the notion of community.

Indeed, a sense of stakeholder uncertainty surrounds the ability of rural communities to support aging in place. Paired with the rural services restructuring, this challenge speaks to a "double jeopardy" concept (Joseph & Cloutier-Fisher, 2005), in which "vulnerable older people are living in vulnerable rural areas" (pp. 137). Community vulnerability, in this context, can be attributed to the lack of community services, lack of transportation and lack of specialized care access. In turn, older peoples' vulnerability stems from the increased likelihood of ill health, low income, impaired

mobility, social supports and social and geographical isolation in rural Canada (Joseph & Cloutier-Fisher, 2005). Continued support for rural seniors demands a downloading of responsibility to families and individual community members to reduce government costs (Skinner & Joseph, 2011). Strengthening the rural voluntary sector (both formal and informal) facilitates individual volunteers' and voluntary organizations' capacity to help retain services essential to supporting aging in place (Ryser & Halseth, 2014; Skinner et al., 2014). However, when voluntarism is crucial to service provision for older residents, younger seniors often become the exclusive (volunteer) service providers as a result of population out-migration and diminishing volunteer pools (Colibaba & Skinner, in press).

Key Challenges in Service Provision for Seniors

Canada's aging population increasingly is straining longstanding problems of service availability and accessibility for rural seniors, in line with the "double jeopardy" burden described earlier (Joseph & Cloutier-Fisher, 2005). Cost-effective, high-quality services are challenging to provide to few rural seniors. This is compounded by the failure of federal and provincial governments to acknowledge distinctive challenges associated with the small-town milieu, such as geographic, socio-economic and technological barriers and a limited pool of both health professionals and volunteers (e.g., Herron, Rosenberg & Skinner, 2016; Herron & Skinner, 2018). Additionally, overwhelming and burdening the voluntary sector emerges as a risk. The challenge of what Colibaba and Skinner (2019) refer to as 'older voluntarism' compounds this risk, in which individual, older (typically 65+) volunteers' activities and voluntary organizations featuring an older volunteer base provide essential services and supports to aging communities (see the Rural Ontario Institute *Focus on Rural Ontario Fact Sheet* on 'Volunteering in non-metro Ontario' for data: http://www.ruralontarioinstitute.ca/uploads/userfiles/files/2016%20Jan27%20updated%20%23%2020%20Volunteering%20in%20non-metro%20Ontario%20(1).pdf)

The widespread prevalence of older voluntarism questions the sustainability of aging rural communities, as it is peer-to-peer service provision within the context of a community that is, itself, aging, and the challenges in maintaining and sustaining satisfactory service delivery. These limitations question whether rural seniors' needs are being met and if rural households and communities are a sustainable source of care. In an era of demographical aging, out-migration and downsizing, the work of the voluntary sector, in conjunction with a limited rural public sector, significantly contributes to communities' ability to continue to provide services, both formal and informal. This is seen across a range of healthcare and community support services (e.g., community support agencies, in-home services), housing (e.g., co-housing), transportation (e.g., volunteer driver programs) and recreation (e.g., service clubs, seniors' associations), among others (e.g., social services, arts and culture, economic development, etc.) (Hanlon & Skinner, in press), some of which we profile in the following section focusing on examples from rural Ontario.

Profiling Services for Seniors in Rural Ontario

This section provides an overview of four services that directly affect older adults living in rural areas, including healthcare and community support services, housing, transportation and recreation. We aim to describe the issue and identify some of the challenges faced by rural communities in service provision, and in turn, some of the challenges for older people who may be receiving a fragmented version of this service. Each concludes by profiling a rural Ontario community or communities that has/have adapted creative, innovative ideas in seeking to address each service delivery challenge.

Healthcare and Community Support Services

Aging in place, defined earlier, is a predominant theme in policy and academic literature and is especially relevant when considering healthcare and community support services. The cost-savings of aging in place make it an attractive strategic direction, as those growing older in their own homes essentially avoid or delay institutional care. Given the widespread belief that older people use a disproportionately large share of Canada's healthcare services (Novak, Northcott & Campbell, 2018), the concept of aging in place has generic appeal and salience. Further, most older people identify aging in place as their strong preference of location to grow older (Salomon, 2010).

"Place," however, must be conceptualized beyond the physical – it should include also the diverse policy, social and personal factors that contribute to the meaning of "place" (Wiles, Leibing, Guberman, Reeve & Allen, 2012). In essence, aging in place requires not only the ability to remain in the place (house and/or community) but to access appropriate services, especially those related to health care. Access to healthcare services and supports then becomes critical in the distinction between aging in place and being "stuck" in place (Torres-Gil & Hofland, 2012). It is here that rural areas may struggle to provide appropriate environments for older people to age in place given the limited healthcare services that often exist, embedded within the prevalence of older voluntarism (Colibaba & Skinner, 2019) and the fact that older rural Canadians access healthcare services less than those living in urban centres (McDonald & Conde, 2010).

Tensions between the concepts of aging in place and stuck in place are acutely prominent when compounded by Wooton's (as cited by Laurent, 2002) distinction between urban and rural health care. Rural areas often are challenged to provide the full continuum of healthcare services, ranging from acute hospital care to institutional care to homecare. The move toward community-based health care represents an adaptation to the needs of an aging rural population. Rates of hospitalization and nursing home institutionalization among older people have declined, in part due to technological improvements and increased reliance on homecare services (Novak et al., 2018). However, with a shift to community-based care systems, rather than acute and institutional care, comes a shift to an underfunded branch of health care.

Community Care Access Centres (now part of Ontario's Local Health Integration Networks) were created in Ontario in the late 1990s, offering a suite of allied health services (e.g., geriatric day hospitals, adult daycare, and assisted living and home care), nursing care, and help with the

activities of daily living (Lysyk, 2017). Moving community care services into a prominent place in the healthcare system is a useful way to support aging in place, but with limited funding and a parallel reduction in acute and institutional care, it may result in a care gap – "the difference between what care could or should be and what care usually is" (Novak et al., 2018, pp. 189). Core challenges to effective rural health service delivery include: difficulty recruiting physicians to rural areas (College of Family Physicians of Canada, 2017); bed closures following budgetary trimming and amalgamation; longer wait times; and further travel distances to access regionalized services. Further, this shift facilitates a paradoxical reliance on community, placing a share of the healthcare burden on the communities and the local volunteers (Skinner, 2008; 2014). Gradual closure of industry in rural Ontario and the parallel out-migration of youth and families precipitated a diffuse, aging population that may be challenging to deliver healthcare services to, however, a downloading of that responsibility onto communities and the voluntary sector likely creates additional health challenges for individuals and financial repercussions for government agencies and funders.

Despite these challenges to healthcare services delivery, community resilience in rural Ontario has supported successful, resourceful approaches to resisting this downsizing. For example, in Arnprior, a small town in Renfrew County (population 10,426), following completion of an assessment of older residents' needs which stemmed from age-friendly planning, volunteers and community leaders formed the Greater Arnprior Seniors' Council. Qualitative results from the needs assessment reflected local long-term care statistics: only 10% of residents on the waitlist for the local long-term care facility (The Grove) the previous year were locally accommodated. Instead, half remained on the waitlist and the other 40% moved to another location to receive appropriate care (Arnprior Regional Health, n.d.). Prepared with these data, the Greater Arnprior Seniors' Council, a community-based voluntary organization, embedded within its terms of reference the need to lobby to increase the supply of long-term care beds (GASC Terms of Reference, 2018) – a task that was successfully achieved in 2017 with the announcement of an additional 36 long-term care beds being added to The Grove with the support of the Seniors' Council's local healthcare and municipal partners (Arnprior Regional Health, 2017). Though age-

GREATER ARNPRIOR SENIORS COUNCIL

About Us

The Greater Arnprior Seniors Council (GASC) was formed in June 2016 as a result of suggestions made in the Arnprior Age-Friendly Community Plan.The GASC is made up of senior citizen members and concerned stakeholders who are concerned about senior needs in the community.

The main goals of the GASC are to

1. **enhance facilities and infrastructure** to enable seniors to fully participate in the community,
2. **improve senior-focused services and supports** while promoting and coordinating existing services and assets, and
3. **foster positive engagement and active lifestyles for seniors**.

friendly programming is designed to capture a variety of dimensions, it may often be implemented at a grassroots scale too small to achieve large-scale, sustainable community change. This example of Arnprior, however, shows that partnerships between volunteers, community organizations and the municipality, when united under an age-friendly umbrella, may hold the power to achieve enduring systemic policy change in rural healthcare.

Housing Services

Housing is identified by the World Health Organization (2007; 2015) as a critical component to aging in place (Davey et al., 2004). Safe, affordable housing that is structurally appropriate and adaptable, proximate to essential services and is well-maintained is essential to facilitate aging in place. In rural areas, meeting seniors' housing needs may be particularly challenging given population decline and reductions in rural service provision. The recent release of Canada's National Housing Strategy (Government of Canada, 2017) considers seniors among those most in need of core housing, especially senior women living alone (e.g., Ryser & Halseth, 2011). It particularly focuses on creating new affordable housing units and repairing existing ones, and on rental support, community housing initiatives for low-income seniors and creating service partnerships to support aging in place. This national strategy directs focus to housing needs of the aging population, however, a broad stroke approach in conjunction with the significant gaps in data may limit the extent to which policy change can reach older rural residents.

Aging in place policies provide supports from the spectrum of environmental, social and economic perspectives to allow people to remain in their homes.

Furthermore, rural communities are diverse in their economic and demographic characteristics, and so even within a rural housing paradigm, housing strategies may discount the diversity that exists within rural landscapes (Ryser & Halseth, 2011). Aging in place policies provide supports from the spectrum of environmental, social and economic perspectives to allow people to remain in their homes. There is a wide variety of housing options that older people may choose from, including private homes, apartments, retirement communities, independent-living lodges, assisted-living facilities and long-term care. Lawton and Nahemow's (1973) ecological model is frequently cited as a theory underpinning the understanding of seniors' housing needs, in which there is a good fit between a person's capability and environmental demands. Indeed, research has consistently demonstrated that satisfaction of older rural residents with their residences and features of their houses most strongly predicted mental health status (e.g., Scheidt, 2017). However, access to the variety of housing choices that embodies this best fit is unequal and may be challenging to achieve in rural areas without an effective alignment of social services (Novak et al., 2018) – services that are today facing downsizing and cost-cutting measures (Hanlon & Skinner, in press), resulting in an experience of being "stuck" in place (Torres-Gil & Hofland, 2012).

Interesting alternative models for older people have recently emerged. Shared housing, in particular, has received attention given the efficiencies of adapting infrastructure rather than

building from the ground up. Further, Ontario's houses contain five million empty bedrooms in the homes of people living in houses that may be too large for their needs (Jones, 2018). Homesharing, although not for everyone, may be facilitated flexibly in a variety of ways (e.g., older people buying a house together (e.g., Hall, 2019), renting apartments at affordable rates in an Abbeyfield-style home designed for older people (Abbeyfield Canada, n.d.); and renting rooms to students facilitated formally through a homesharing organization (e.g., Canadian Press, 2018). Homesharing models are receiving media attention given their efficient, intuitively positive nature, and there is strong potential to be applied to rural areas. Depending on the arrangement, people may choose to leave their homes but stay in their community, or to remain in their homes with the financial and also non-financial support of another person.

In the small town (pop. 2,753) of Lakefield in Peterborough County, 40% of the population is over 65 (Statistics Canada, 2016). Lakefield is close in proximity to the City of Peterborough, however a recent needs assessment found that older adults would far prefer to remain living in Lakefield in their later years than move (Rutherford et al., 2018). Its walkability, array of basic services and sense of community (typically common to rural Canada) were key reasons why participants largely wished to remain – preferring not to have to establish new formal and informal connections. For example, one participant reflected: "...if you are a part of a community your health improves". Although residents wished to remain in Lakefield, limited retirement living options challenge the ability to age in place. As a reaction, exploring the development of an Abbeyfield house has emerged as a local, volunteer-based grassroots approach to addressing this challenge. The Abbeyfield model originated in the UK and has only recently been introduced to Canada. Currently, there are four Abbeyfield Houses in Ontario. More information about each of these Houses can be found at www.abbeyfield.ca/province/on.

Abbeyfield Houses Society of Caledon

Abbeyfield Houses Society of Durham

Abbeyfield Ottawa

Abbeyfield Toronto – Lakeside House

The Abbeyfield House Society of Lakefield, governed by a volunteer board, is working toward founding an Abbeyfield house, a type of shared, 'family-style' rental house for older people that offers communal living arrangements geared toward the middle-income bracket. A more affordable housing option than home ownership or assisted living, Abbeyfield housing, at approximately $1250-$1500/month, includes private bedrooms/suites with a bathroom, shared common spaces, a kitchen and a guest bedroom. A house coordinator takes care of general daily tasks, shopping, and meal preparation, while volunteers complete maintenance and yard work. In Lakefield, volunteers have conducted a needs assessment, completed a business plan and developed community-level partnerships that will support its development. Innovative, grassroots housing ideas founded in principles of community individuality and aging in place such as this will allow older people to age in their own rural communities without the development of new infrastructure.

Transportation Services

Rural transportation is intrinsically linked to independence, providing access to social and cultural events, services and shopping. Limited transportation access can remove the sense of security and control associated with being able to freely participate in these regular activities. Older people typically relate transportation access directly to their quality of life, particularly those who are single or live alone, are recently widowed and have health challenges (Novak et al., 2018). However, transportation challenges may be compounded in rural areas given limited alternatives and scattered settlement patterns (Newbold, Dardas & Williams, 2018). The ability to drive privately owned vehicles provides access to community services in the local or wider area, and public transportation programs typically do not exist.

Older people typically relate transportation access directly to their quality of life, particularly those who are single or live alone, are recently widowed and have health challenges

Informal familial and social transportation resources may be available for some older people, however, consistent dependence may not be realistic or preferable (Weeks, Stadnyk, Begley & MacDonald, 2015). Most older people continue to drive given its importance to service access (Dobbs & Strain, 2008), however, a higher accident rate and increased likelihood of death in a collision as a result of frailty (Somes & Donatelli, 2017) when compared to most age groups (Turcotte, 2012) makes consideration of primary transportation in older age important. This is especially important as downsized or restructured services may additionally require residents to drive further afield than perhaps they have been used to or are comfortable with, particularly within the limits of light and road conditions during the winter. Indeed, Turcotte (2012) illuminates this challenge: "Outside census metropolitan areas and census agglomerations, alternatives to the car are virtually non-existent as primary means of travel" (pp. 12). Continuing to drive may not be a choice but a means of necessity for older people living in rural areas (Mattson, 2011), as it may be the difference between aging in place (Davey et al., 2004) and being "stuck" in place (Torres-Gil & Hofland, 2012). Service restructuring compounded with a rapidly aging rural population inevitably puts the onus back onto residents themselves to travel further afield to access services (Ryser & Halseth, 2012).

Public transportation is normally required for those with mobility challenges or as an alternative to driving (Novak et al., 2018). Rural areas typically do not have public transportation, however, some jurisdictions in rural Ontario have developed creative and viable alternatives that may support older residents who can no longer drive. Paratransit services may use smaller accessible vehicles with a flexible scheduling program, or door-to-door services through local healthcare organizations (See *Accelerating Rural Transportation Solutions – Ten Community Case Studies* for examples of communities working on solutions: http://www.ruralontarioinstitute.ca/uploads/userfiles/files/ARTS_-_Case_Studies_for_WEB.pdf). Though these options are more flexible than public transportation, they may require longer-term bookings and significant wait times for riders. Sustainability challenges exist when these initiatives are municipally driven, however coordination of transportation policies at a larger regional level through comprehensive transportation strategies may be an effective alternative (Ryser & Halseth, 2012).

Following a comprehensive needs assessment by the Temiskaming Shores Age-Friendly Steering Committee, which identified transportation access as a major challenge for older rural residents in Temiskaming Shores, a town in Northeastern Ontario (population 9,920), a two-pronged approach to strengthen rural transportation was undertaken, both of which built upon existing services and resources. A shared, coordinated regional approach between five transportation providers saw the development of a 1-800 number for older people to access information about accessible transit (Ontario Community Transportation Network, 2019). By phoning this number, older people are provided options to access to a large geographic area for a small cost, with escorts and companions riding for free (Timiskaming Home Support, 2019). The 1-800 number was strategically advertised through members of the coordinated partnership to increase awareness (Ontario Community Transportation Network, 2019).

Second, a rider training program was developed, following the purchase of accessible buses and an expansion of routes to some of the rural outskirts. The training was targeted at older adults, aiming to teach how to use the community's expanded public transportation – particularly necessary given the increased rural reach and the likelihood that older rural residents may never have taken the bus. Further, a local grocery store has also begun to provide transportation to older people looking to get groceries (City of Temiskaming Shores, 2016). This demonstrates the momentum that can be facilitated within a community when an issue, in this case transportation, is tackled regionally, relieving the pressure from individual organizations and services to independently address the gap in services. In this case, a combined regional approach in conjunction with community-level participation have facilitated an enhanced transportation network for older people living in Temiskaming Shores.

Older people today are staying engaged in their communities for longer than ever before.

Recreation Services

Though participation in recreation declines with age, older people adapt their activities to best fit their ability. Canadian baby boomers are more active than their predecessors, supported by higher levels of health, education and affluence. Older people today are staying engaged in their communities for longer than ever before. As an underlying structural support to this movement toward health and longevity in later years, the Canadian social context has recently emphasized health promotion in addition to prevention (Novak et al., 2018). Physical health is related to leisure activity involvement and well-being among older people (Paggi, Jopp, & Hertzog, 2016), and so emphasizing recreation is an essential component of a holistic suite of service provision.

Canada's existing recreation infrastructure must continue to adapt as more Canadians grow older, aiming to support leisure and recreation. In rural areas, without state-of-the-art gyms, pools and ice surfaces, for example, recreation opportunities may appear limited. Their diffuse nature may constrain walkability: research has demonstrated that neighbourhood walkability (proximity to services or public transportation) and walking infrastructure (e.g., access to parks and fitness facilities) is correlated with older peoples' recreation engagement (Carlson et al., 2012). Further, access almost always requires a vehicle, often limiting participation. Challenging weather conditions may similarly prevent access (Aronson & Oman, 2004; Ryser & Halseth, 2012).

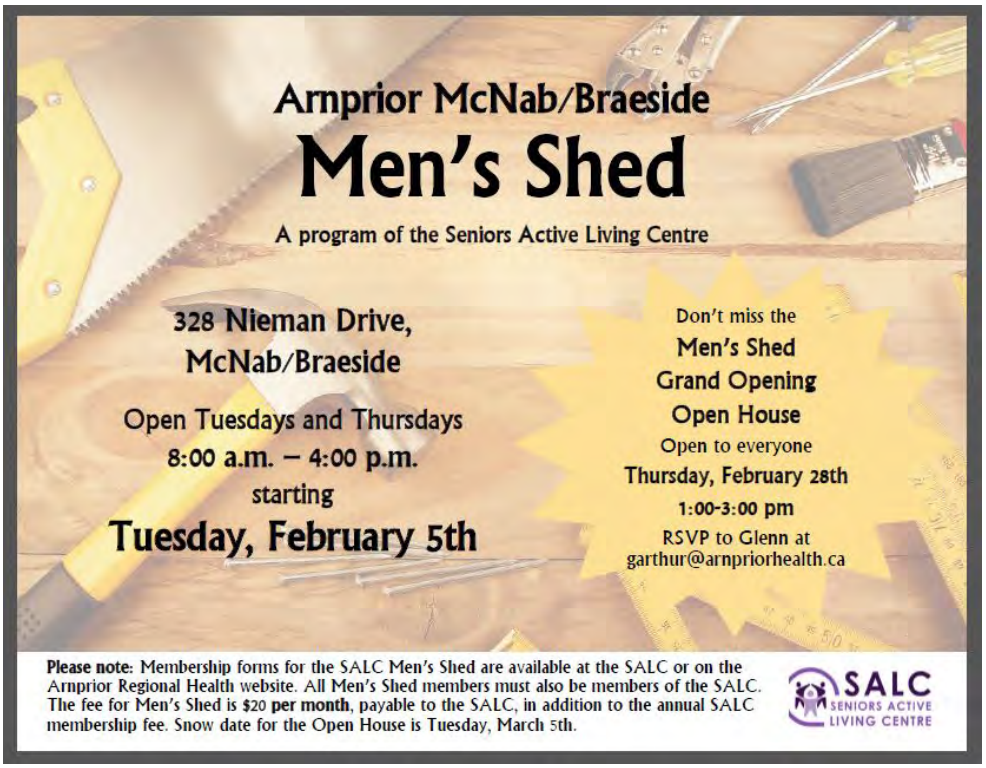
Perhaps unsurprisingly, physical activity in rural areas tends to be lower than in urban centres (Statistics Canada, 2011).Despite this, rural communities are often rich in alternative forms of recreation for older people. Perceptions of activity may differ among rural older adults, with research demonstrating that 'traditional' forms of activity and recreation may be lower among rural older adults. However, a contextualized analysis demonstrates that supporting and encouraging specific activities that make sense within an active rural lifestyle are more likely to receive uptake (Witcher et al., 2016).

Further, seniors' clubs and organizations in rural areas often have successful, strong membership growing from the rapidly aging population. It is clear that employing a specifically rural lens to understanding and conceptualizing rural recreation provides a more accurate perspective. Unique to the rural context, however, rural municipalities and voluntary organizations alike are under pressure to provide a suite of recreation services to residents. Population out-migration leaves fewer taxpayers, many of which are older themselves. Small municipalities are stretched to provide basic municipal services, and rural recreation, despite its importance to health and wellness, may not be able to be prioritized. Despite strong membership, seniors' clubs and other service organizations are typically challenged by older voluntarism, in which older people comprise the foundational volunteer pool, creating uncertainty about sustainability and longevity (Colibaba & Skinner, 2019). Influx of rural retirees without place-based attachment cannot be relied upon to help sustain these initiatives as they are not typically as involved in the community (Winterton & Warburton, 2014).

Rural Ontario presents many examples of comprehensive, appropriate recreation opportunities for older people. From informational sessions on seniors-specific topics such as falls prevention, to exercise programs, cooking and music classes, there often exists a wide variety of recreation opportunities. For example, in Beaverton, the Community Health Centre offers community-based exercise, drumming for health, guided meditation and yoga, and at the Seniors' Active Living Centre in Arnprior, the centre is open daily for four hours for a variety of activities such as carpet bowling, chair yoga, shuffleboard, swimming and ukulele, both formal and informal (Arnprior Regional Health, 2019a).

To meet the gender gap that is often found in programming for older adults, the active living centre has recently begun a Men's Shed that provides a daily space for older men to work on hobbies and projects such as building picnic tables and planter boxes.

In Temiskaming Shores, a regular coffee hour for older people has become a major staple of recreation for older people in the area, with its operations having become embedded within the municipality (City of Temiskaming Shores, 2016). Although similar examples of these recreation programs can be found in many rural communities across Ontario, what makes these programs particularly unique is their partnerships or embeddedness within healthcare organizations and/or municipalities.



Rural recreation programs are often implemented at the volunteer level through age-friendly programs or community centres, engendering limited sustainability given volunteer burnout and limited capacity (Russell, Skinner & Fowler, 2019). In these examples, the challenges often faced by rural communities to facilitate sustainable and beneficial recreation programs for older people have drawn on partnerships with healthcare organizations and municipalities to overcome pitfalls that may be faced by those relying on older voluntarism (Colibaba & Skinner, 2019). By building capacity through partnerships, it is likely that similar rural programming, when designed in a way that meets the specific needs of local older adults, may be sustained to achieve long term health and wellness benefits for participants.

Conclusion

Although the drivers of population aging in rural Ontario typically differ by community (e.g., those viewed as retirement communities, those with high proportions of people choosing to age in place, and those experiencing rapid youth out-migration in conjunction with aging in place) (CIHR, 2017), the proportion of rural populations in Ontario that are older is growing quickly. As we have demonstrated in this Foresight Paper, the provision of services that directly relate to quality of life for older residents (e.g., healthcare and community support services, housing, transportation and recreation) living in rural communities may mediate tensions between aging in place, considered an optimal choice for growing older, and being "stuck" in place, in which a person must remain in their own home or community despite it not suiting their needs or abilities.

Decisions to downsize and restructure rural services may be made based on fiscal challenges; however, the pervasive absence of public service delivery in small, rural areas likely will increasingly and negatively impact the population which remains in those areas (Hanlon & Skinner, in press). With this in mind, there exists a conspicuous strain between two policy options: the first, to promote healthy aging through aging in place at both the federal and provincial levels, and the second, to promote fiscal efficiencies given population out-migration and decline in rural areas. In reference to a contemporary, global example, age-friendly programs (WHO 2007, 2015) are often developed to fill the gaps left by the closure of rural services, as our profiles of health, housing, transportation and recreation services in rural Ontario have shown, however, programs implemented primarily by the voluntary sector may lack sustainability and effectiveness, given factors such as volunteer burnout and older voluntarism.

Further, consistent with the literature (e.g., Colibaba & Skinner, 2019; Russell et al., 2019), we observed that this approach may transfer undue stressors to community members, organizations and volunteers by downloading state-level responsibility for essential and non-essential services. Indeed, key studies of rural aging across Canada, particularly Skinner et al. (2008), Keating et al., (2011) and Russell et al. (2019), have shown that partnerships with local governments and healthcare organizations may strengthen program sustainability and reach to older residents, yet the deprivation of essential services still remains, with age-friendly programs providing a only stopgap rather than a viable alternative to closures or restructuring of essential rural services. As the older population in rural Ontario continues to increase, federal and provincial governments must seek to improve the balance between conflicting policies in support of community leaders and older resident efforts to age in place and sustain services for seniors in Ontario's aging rural communities.

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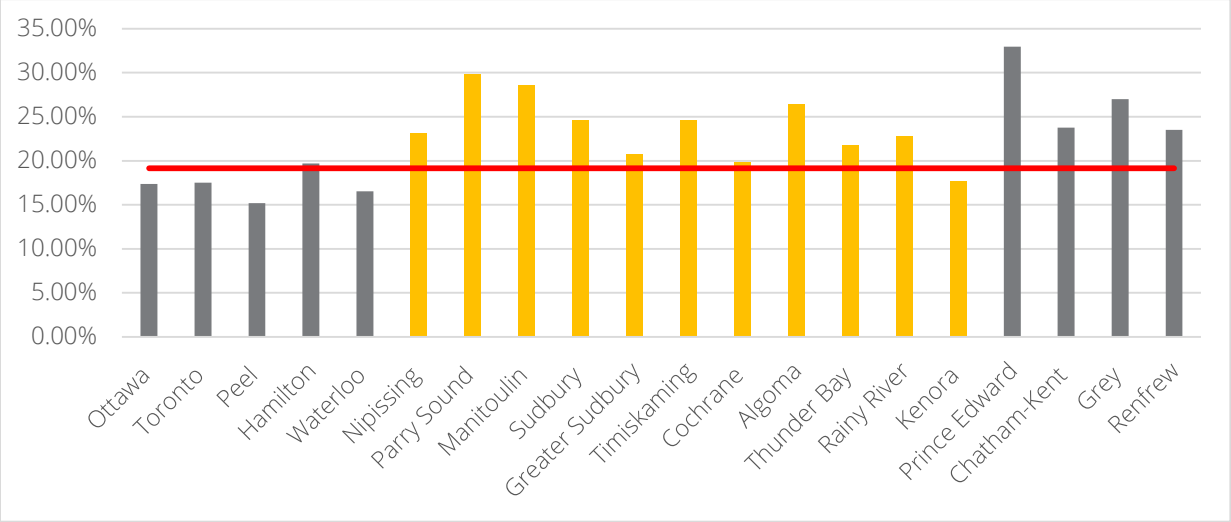
Northern Perspective: Services for an Aging Rural Population

Hilary Hagar

If anyone understands the challenges of an aging population, its northerners. Despite its vast geography, Northern Ontario is home to about 6% of all Ontarians and 7% of all Ontario seniors (Statistics Canada 2016). Looking at the proportion of people over age 65, many northern districts are above the provincial average (19%) (Fig. 1). Indeed, the disproportionate amount of elderly in northern and rural areas makes the concerns surrounding services for seniors more pertinent.

Figure 1: Percent of Population Age 65+ by Selected Districts



Source: Statistics Canada 2016.

Because of the geographical distance, aging in place is particularly challenging for northern seniors. Moving to a community with more services could mean travelling hundreds, possibly thousands of kilometers. The North is also home to much of Ontario's Indigenous population, who specifically emphasize aging in place as it allows for continued social and environmental connection (Pace and Grenier 2016, 254).

However, as Skinner and McCrillis note, rural and northern areas are "subject to the longstanding deprivation of public infrastructure", which limits the breadth and quality of essential services for aging in place.

Indeed, Northern Ontario lacks the appropriate services for seniors such as available physicians (Newberry 2018; Pong 2008). Yet, there have been efforts towards physician attraction and

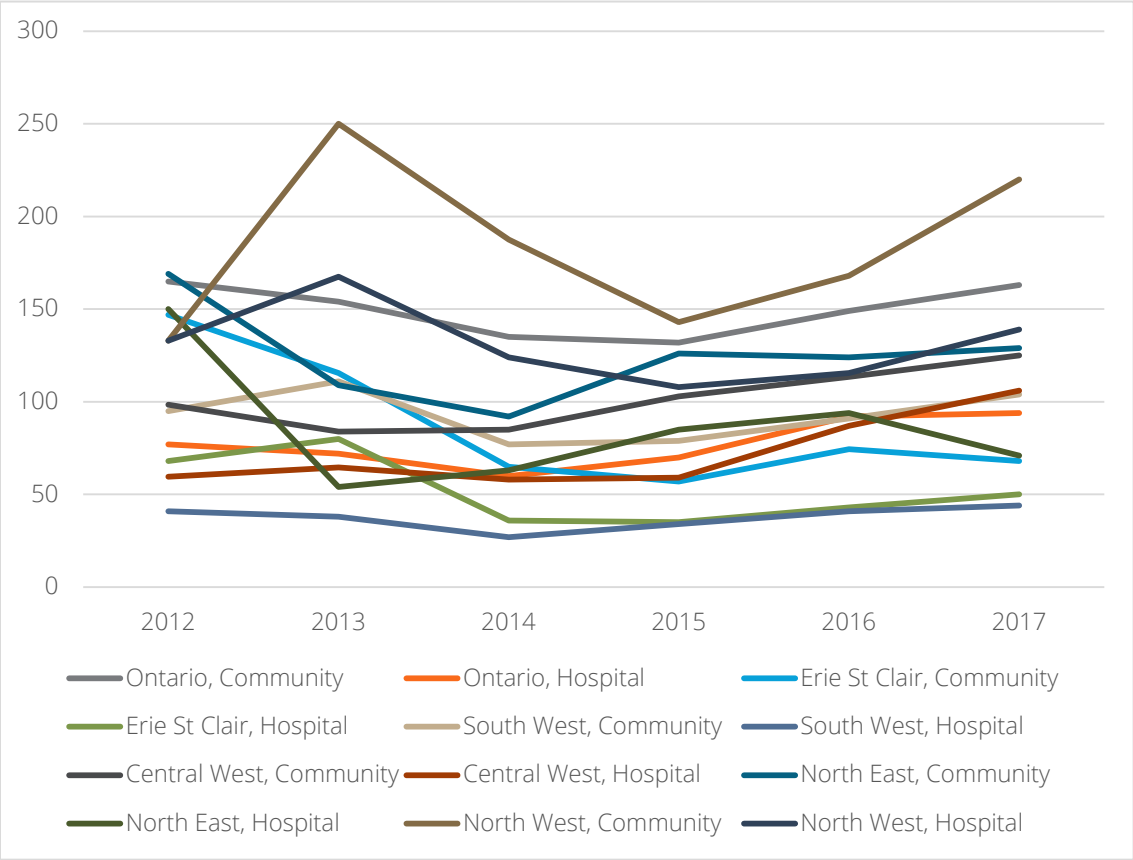
retention. HealthForceOntario's Northern and Rural Recruitment and Retention Initiative aims to attract physicians by offering financial incentives to those who establish a full-time practice in a rural or northern community (Ontario 2017). The Northern Ontario School of Medicine (NOSM) also attempts to recruit physicians by giving the opportunity to study in the North (see the *Access to Quality Medical and Health Services* Foresight Paper). Interestingly, NOSM is finishing a three-year-long study looking to recruit doctors from Northern European countries (CBC 2016). Ultimately, overcoming physician maldistribution in Northern Ontario will take the "adoption of multiple strategies but also simultaneous use of different strategies" (Pong 2008).

Further, housing options are also limited for seniors in the North. Many seniors in Northwestern Ontario, in particular, live alone (Northwestern Ontario District Health Council 2004). As Skinner and McCrillis state, support for rural seniors is often downloaded to family and community members. This is a challenge for northerners. Not only do seniors rely more heavily on unpaid care or assistance in Northwestern Ontario than the provincial average (Northwestern Ontario District Health Council 2004), the out-migration of families and youth means that many who could assist seniors living independently are no longer in the community (Making Kenora Home 2007).

Skinner and McCrillis acknowledge that offering a variety of housing options for seniors in rural areas is challenging "without the effective alignment of social services". Because rural seniors have less access to supports in their homes, a greater number are being directed to long-term care homes (LTC) than seniors in urban areas (AMO 2016). In fact, individuals on LTC waitlists in rural and remote regions surrounding Thunder Bay were more likely to be cognitively intact and experience less difficulty with daily living activities than those in Thunder Bay (Williams et al. 2016). Instead of living in LTC, these individuals could be living in seniors' homes or other community-based living situations.

Accessing LTC is also difficult. The average LTC wait times are longer in the Northeast and Northwest than other areas of rural Ontario (Fig. 2). In particular, since 2013, placements in the Northwest from the community have had longer wait lists than the provincial average (Fig. 2).

Figure 2: Median number of days people waited to move into a long-term care home, in Ontario, by selected regions, by prior location



Source: Ontario 2019

Requirements to provide LTC homes are also different in the north. Each municipality in Southern Ontario "is required by law to establish and maintain a long-term care home" (AMO 2016). However, for Northern Ontario municipalities, this is optional (AMO 2016). To further complicate the issue of housing, the north has challenges recruiting and retaining essential staff, such as nurses and personal support workers (Zefi 2019).

Other conventional housing options, such as retirement homes, are also limited. Of the 745 licensed retirement homes in the province, approximately 4% (31) are in Northern Ontario (RHRA, n.d.). Of the 31 retirement homes in the north, 81% are located in the five largest cities in Northern Ontario (RHRA, n.d.). Seniors seeking retirement homes outside these cities will likely have a limited selection. Even in communities with retirement homes, access could still be a challenge. Many seniors living on fixed incomes find retirement homes too expensive (Northwestern Ontario District Health Council 2004). Certainly, there is a need for "innovative, grassroots housing ideas founded in principles of community individuality and aging in place", as recommended by Skinner and McCrillis.

Another challenge is transportation. While public transit options do exist in northern cities, transportation between communities can be difficult. One of the ways this issue is addressed is

through the Northern Health Travel Grant, which provides subsidized transportation to northern individuals who live at least 100 kilometers away from the nearest medical specialist (Ontario 2019b). Other community-based transportation services exist for seniors in the north, noted by Skinner and McCrillis' examples in Temiskaming Shores. With the use of technology, efforts are being made to eliminate the need for transportation altogether. Timiskaming Health Unit, for example, hosts a "Senior Centre without Walls" which allows seniors to participate in activities and presentations via conference call at no cost (Timiskaming Health Unit 2019).

While these services are steps in the right direction, barriers for northern seniors to age in place still remain. For the increasing number of seniors in the north, this will take the collaborative effort of various actors. Community organizations, as well as government at provincial and local levels, will need to generate innovative and grass-root approaches to provide these much needed services. Both seniors and communities will be "stuck" without this effort.

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FUNDING & GRANT OPPORTUNITIES

The table below lists a select number of grants available for downtown revitalization and related projects. Please see this website for a current list of open government funding opportunities.

Grant Opportunity	Description	Funding Amount
Head Start in Business	Offer programs for youth entrepreneurship.	N/A
Northern Ontario Women	A Project to stimulate women-owned and women-led business start-ups and scale-ups by increasing access to business development supports throughout the Northern Ontario region.	♦ NOW SME Program covers 90% of project costs ♦ Access to other resources and supports
Municipal Asset Management Program	Offers funding, training, and resources to help you strengthen your asset management practices.	Various grant funding for updating municipal infrastructure
Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation Fund	Invest in structural and natural infrastructure projects to increase the resilience of communities that are impacted by natural disasters triggered by climate change.	Funding based on projects
Canada Community-Building Fund	A permanent source of federal funding for local infrastructure.	Funding based on projects
Green Municipal Fund	Supports sustainability projects that can transform your community and lower GHG emissions.	♦ Grants from $100-500k for up to 80% of eligible costs (up to 100% for first-time applicants) ♦ Combined grant and loan to a maximum of $10M for up to 80% of eligible costs ♦ Grant up to 15 percent of the total loan amount ♦ Additional 5 percent grant available if the project involves the remediation of a brownfield site

Grant Opportunity	Description	Funding Amount
Community Investment Initiative for Northern Ontario	Enable municipalities and Indigenous communities to increase the number of community and/or regional economic development initiatives implemented leading to increased business investment; job creation; and increased regional collaboration and partnerships among communities.	♦ Up to 90% of eligible costs to a maximum of $100,000 annually for a period of up to three years ♦ A regional project may be eligible for increased funding up to $170,000 depending on the number of partner communities and geographic coverage ♦ Contributions will be non-repayable
Regional Economic Growth through Innovation	Business scale up and productivity Regional innovation ecosystems for not-for-profit organizations Targeted Manufacturing Initiative for Northern Ontario.	Various
Tourism Growth Program (TGP) in Northern Ontario	Support Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, small and medium-sized businesses and not-for-profit organizations in developing local tourism products and experiences.	♦ Max $250,000 ♦ Commercial projects up to 50% of capital costs and 75% for other costs. ♦ Non-commercial projects up to 100% of eligible costs
Community Economic Development	Supporting communities' efforts to plan and mobilize their resources, enhance business growth, and exploit new opportunities for economic development and diversification.	Up to 33 percent of eligible capital and up to 50 percent of eligible non-capital costs
Economic Development Initiative	The EDI is an incremental programming initiative that supports economic development activities and approaches that respond directly to related priorities of OLMCs and/or that address linguistic duality issues.	Various

Grant Opportunity	Description	Funding Amount
North Claybelt	Access to repayable capital Special Initiative Fund	♦ Special Initiative Fund – maximum $1,500 which represents 75% of costs ♦ Access to repayable capital – up to $75k
Youth Internship	FedNor provides support for youth interns under three funding programs: Regional Economic Growth through Innovation (REGI), Northern Ontario Development Program (NODP) and the Economic Development Initiative (EDI).	♦ Up to 90 percent to a maximum contribution of $35,000 annually toward the eligible costs of salary and employee benefit expenses ♦ Up to 90 percent to a maximum contribution of $5,000 toward eligible ancillary costs
Ontario Trillium Foundation	♦ Seed Grant ♦ Grow Grant	♦ Min $10k – Max $100k ♦ TBD
Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership	Agriculture focused grants	Various
Link North	Supports innovative entrepreneurs and Small-Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) across far northeast Ontario.	Resources and assistance, not funding
NADF Loans & Grants	Financial solutions caters to diverse needs, whether it's securing funding for innovative ventures, launching a startup, or acquiring an existing enterprise.	Various loans and grants
Invest North Program	Designed to boost economic growth in Northern Ontario by encouraging businesses to invest in transformative, strategic and complementary business development opportunities in Northern communities.	Various grants

Grant Opportunity	Description	Funding Amount
Ontario Funding Opportunities	List of Ontario grants available.	Various grants
Building Communities Through Arts and Heritage – Local Festivals Program	Supports local groups for recurring festivals that present the work of local artists, artisans, or heritage performers.	Access up to 100% of eligible expenses to a maximum of $200,000
Canada Cultural Spaces Fund	Support for projects that improve the physical condition of arts and heritage collaboration, creation, presentation, and exhibition spaces.	♦ Up to 50% to $500k-$15M depending on the project type ♦ Up to 75% for rural and underserved communities
Clean Energy for Rural and Remote Communities Program	Supports project proposals that contribute to a variety or clean energy projects for rural and remote Canadian communities.	This program has no maximum funding amount.
Federal New Horizons for Seniors	1. The community-based stream of the New Horizons for Seniors Program (NHSP) is a federal grant that supports community-based projects that are designed by seniors for seniors. This program funds projects that empower seniors in their communities and contribute to improving their health and well-being. 2. Alternate version for smaller projects.	1. Up to $25,000 – applications were due in November 2023, but looks like it may be annual 2. Up to $5,000 – currently closed, but notes "We will post details about the new application process shortly."
Enabling Accessibility Fund – Small Projects Component	This funding opportunity aims to make communities and workplaces across Canada more accessible for persons with disabilities. It will fund projects that create more opportunities for persons with disabilities to take part in community	♦ Up to $125,000 for a project that is up to 2 years in duration ♦ Apply May 28, 2024, to July 23, 2024, at 3:00 pm EDT

Grant Opportunity	Description	Funding Amount
	activities, programs and services, and access employment. Not explicitly for Aging in Place, but perhaps one could argue that many seniors have disabilities.	
Age Well at Home	1. **In-Home Support Pilot Projects Stream –** eligible organizations with experience delivering volunteer-based services to low-income and otherwise vulnerable seniors can receive funding to expand their services to more seniors or offer additional services, as well as help seniors navigate and access eligible services provided by other local organizations. Projects must take place within a local area (not on a national or provincial/territorial scale) and end by March 31, 2025. 2. **Scaling Up for Seniors Stream –** organizations can receive funding to expand services that have already demonstrated results in helping seniors age in place. Applications must include the delivery of services in more than one province or territory. Indigenous governments and organizations located in Quebec can choose whether to propose to scale up within a single province or territory. - Projects must scale up services that have already shown positive results in Canada in helping seniors age in place, and must end by March 31, 2025.	1. Funding between $300,000 and $800,000 available per project 2. Funding between $100,000 and $2 million available per project

Grant Opportunity	Description	Funding Amount
Ontario Seniors Community Grant Program	The seniors grants support local, not-for-profit community groups and organizations to deliver programs and learning opportunities for Ontarians aged 55+. This funding allows community groups across the province to offer a wide variety of activities that help seniors to live independently, ensure their safety and security, connect them to their community, avoid isolation and help them achieve greater financial security and social connections. More information.	♦ Applications were open February 2024 – closed now, but sounds like a yearly thing ♦ Hundreds of Seniors Community Grants available, ranging from $1,000 to $25,000 each
EnAbling Change Program, 2024-25	More focused on disabilities but could be applied here. One project priority is increasing accessibility for services, like programs that provide transport for healthcare. Eligibility – a Not-for-Profit Organization that can reach across an industry or sector in Ontario and has been incorporated in Ontario or Canada for at least one year OR a municipality governed by the Municipal Act, 2001 or any other Act of the Legislature	♦ Due June 27, 2024 ♦ Various funding
Inclusive Community Grants	The Inclusive Community Grants (ICG) Program increases awareness of age-friendly community planning principles including accessibility planning by funding projects that help local governments, not-for-profit organizations and Indigenous communities develop local age-friendly community plans that	♦ 2024 version was due in May – might repeat next year ♦ Up to $60,000

Grant Opportunity	Description	Funding Amount
	consider Ontarians of all ages and abilities.	
Seniors Active Living Centres Program	Priorities – connect older adults with community programs and services; senior services for underserved populations/communities; promote inclusion of all seniors (literacy, disabilities) in programs and services. "Centres" can be a specific location, or could be spread across an area (satellite), or innovative ideas such as mobile services and programs.	♦ 2024 version was due in February, sounds like it repeats every year. ♦ Maintenance and operating funding – up to $50,000 ♦ Special grants (for new programs/one-time) – up to $15,000
Ontario Energy Board – Low-income Energy Assistance Program	If you're behind on your electricity or natural gas bill and face having your service disconnected, you may qualify for emergency financial help through the Low-income Energy Assistance Program (LEAP). *Not explicitly for seniors but could help.*	Customers who meet income eligibility can get up to $650 in emergency assistance for their electricity bills ($780 if their home is heated electrically) and $650 for natural gas bills.
FCC AgriSpirit Fund	Do you have a capital project that will enrich lives in your rural community? The FCC AgriSpirit Fund supports projects in communities of less than 150,000 people by charities, non-profit groups, and First Nations, Inuit or Métis governments/communities. Supports: Projects that improve accessibility and inclusion.	♦ Applications are closed and will re-open in the spring of 2025. ♦ Various funding

Grant Opportunity	Description	Funding Amount
Rio Tinto Aluminium Canada Fund	♦ Community has to be in area of one of the mines, but most of the mines seem rural. Might be useful. ♦ Health and well-being: Promote the physical and mental health and well-being of the community through the development of innovative programmes or services that benefit its population ♦ Community: Contribute to the economic vitality and quality of life of our host communities by supporting initiatives that promote their sustainability and liveability ♦ Increased attention is given to all projects that support Indigenous communities.	Various
BMO Gives	We empower communities by funding the development of tools and resources such as mentorship programs, financial literacy workshops and increasing access to arts and culture. Giving areas include: cultural enrichment, **health and wellbeing, health equity**, education and skills-building, disaster relief, and economic development. We champion diversity, equity, and inclusion within BMO and our communities to foster a society that embraces individual differences. Giving areas include: allyship and education, **equity-deserving groups**, history and culture.	Applications open between: ♦ February 1-March 31 and ♦ September 2-October 14

Grant Opportunity	Description	Funding Amount
CN Donations & Sponsorships	Through the CN Stronger Communities Fund, CN contributes millions of dollars each year to organizations and initiatives that promote health and safety, innovation, environmental sustainability, diversity and inclusion, and civic engagement.	Various

CASE STUDIES

#1 – OVERNIGHT ACCOMMODATIONS: ASPEN CROSSING

BACKGROUND & EVOLUTION

Mossleigh, Alberta is a charming rural community located just over an hour east of Calgary. While its serene landscape and small community make it an appealing place to live, the lengthy commute to Calgary poses a challenge for those seeking employment other than farming. To address this, the concept of Aspen Crossing was born—a unique tourism destination aimed at drawing visitors to the area. Aspen Crossing has flourished, offering attractions such as train excursions, dining experiences, and a variety of seasonal events. Today, it stands as a testament to innovative local development, turning Mossleigh into a thriving hub of tourism and economic activity.

https://aspencrossing.com/

Aspen Crossing began as a simple tree nursery in 1999 on 20 acres of private family farmland. When challenged by the high costs of retail space in Calgary, they decided to open a garden center on-site in 2004. With 10-12 unused acres, Aspen Crossing began constructing a campground in 2008, starting with just 20 simple camping plots.

When the last train ran through Aspen Crossing in 2002 and the tracks were decommissioned, they went through six years of negotiation to convince CP Rail to sell 14 miles of track running through Mossleigh. By May 2015, Aspen Crossing Railway made its inaugural run with over 100 guests.

Aspen Crossing leveraged this railway heritage to offer diverse train excursions and events. Trains run all summer, with special seasonal events such as "The Train of Terror" for Halloween and the "Polar Express5 " for Christmas. Train rides range from themed experiences to educational tours and holiday-themed rides, making the Aspen Crossing experience continue to grow.

EXPANDING INTO OVERNIGHT ACCOMMODATION

The development of enhanced camping facilities was a natural extension to improve the tourist experience. Aspen Crossing initially offered only traditional camping spots and RV sites, but later introduced unique stays in caboose cabins. These cabins, sourced from various railways, offer modern amenities such as full bathrooms, kitchens, gas fireplaces, and laundry facilities.

Aspen Crossing’s campground is now a major attraction, featuring 350 full-service sites with fire pits. Group sites with shelters, indoor wood fireplaces, and community fire pits are also available. The diverse offerings include a Station Gift Shop, a dining experience in a historic Pullman railcar, and events like the Southern Alberta Music Festival.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

The owner has invested $2 million in equipment and tracks to date. Aspen Crossing plans to acquire additional passenger rail cars and construct a maintenance shed to support the rail tour's growth. Estimated capital costs for these expansions are $1.3 million, with projections of significant revenue growth over the next five years.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COCHRANE

DEVELOPMENT OF OVERNIGHT ACCOMMODATIONS

Investing in overnight accommodation is a great way to attract tourists, especially due to the remote location of the Town of Cochrane. Options could include eco-friendly lodges, cabins, and unique glamping solutions.

- Log Cabins – rustic yet modern cabins with amenities like solar power, composting toilets, and propane-heated showers can provide a cozy stay with minimal infrastructure development required.
- Lodges – larger accommodations with communal areas, dining facilities, and eco-friendly designs can cater to groups and families while keeping the infrastructure development minimal.
- HypeDome (or similar) Pods – these pods come with stoves and can be equipped with full bathrooms. Starting at $13,000 CAD, they offer a luxurious camping experience and minimal setup.
- Pods with Amenities – Similar to Whitepod Eco-Luxury Hotel in Switzerland, offering pods with full bathrooms, pellet stoves, and options for Wi-Fi and breakfast delivery.
- Clear Igloos – inspired by Kakslauttanen Arctic Resort in Finland, igloos can be an attraction themselves, providing a unique stay during the northern lights season.

ENHANCING THE TOURIST EXPERIENCE

By combining the overnight accommodation with a full tourism experience, Cochrane can develop a niche market for ecological tourists aiming to explore and connect with the outdoors. Consider offering packages that include other activities at a discounted price to market the perfect vacation for any season.

ACTIVIES & EXPERIENCES

- Snowmobiling Trails – maintain the already-popular and extensive snowmobiling trails, offering guided tours and equipment rentals.
- Polar Bear Exhibit – Offer guided polar bear viewing tours with knowledgeable guides. Consider crafting educational or themed workshops around the polar bear exhibit.
- Wildlife & Hiking Tours – offer wildlife tours that highlight local fauna beyond polar bears, ensuring a year-round draw.
- Cultural Experiences – collaborate with local Indigenous communities to offer cultural tours and educational experiences.

- **Northern Lights Stays –** consider offering packages during the Aurora Borealis in Cochrane. This can include night-tours, photography sessions, and themed dinners outdoors.
- **Festival Packages –** offer stays during the Town's festivals that include a guide as well as tickets or promotions to test the vendor's offerings.
- **Full-Day Tours –** offer a full day of activities such as guided snowmobiling, dining, and Aurora Borealis hunting.

#2 – SHELBURNE: A TOWN IN TRANSITION

SEPTEMBER 16, 2018 | JEFF ROLLINGS

According to Statistics Canada, Shelburne is Ontario's fastest-growing town – and for residents old and new, that's mostly a good thing.

It's hard to know what William Jelly, founder of Shelburne, would make of the town today.

The small rural community, Dufferin County's second largest urban centre, has long played second fiddle to Orangeville. But Shelburne made national news this year as the fastest-growing town over 5,000 in Ontario, and the second fastest in Canada, behind only Blackfalds, Alberta. Between 2011 and 2016, Shelburne's population grew by 39.1 per cent, to 8,126 from 5,841. Currently about 8,500 people call the town home.

Indeed, the only previous time the town has experienced such dramatic growth was during Jelly's day. Founded in 1865 as Jelly's Corners and renamed Shelburne a year later, by 1869 the population had grown to 70. Over the next eight years there was a boom, and by 1877 the population had swelled to 750.

An aerial view of downtown Shelburne. Between 2011 and 2016, the town's population grew by 39.1 per cent, to 8,126 from 5,841. Currently about 8,500 people call the town home. Photo by Rosemary Hasner / Black Dog Creative Arts.

But then growth slowed. By 1901, the year after Jelly died, the population stood at 1,188. For the next half century, it remained essentially frozen – in 1951 the population was 1,184. If there was a newcomer, it was likely a farmer retiring to town.

At the 1951 Shelburne Fall Fair, you could still enter a hog-calling contest, though for women there was an alternative: a husband-calling contest. It was also the first year of Shelburne's legendary Canadian Open Old-Time Fiddlers' Contest. Broadcast live on CBC Radio for decades, it provided the town with a few days of national glory every summer.

It wasn't enough to keep the young people around though. Like many small-town kids, they most often left to seek adventure in the big city. Although that hasn't changed much, young families and others are flocking to Shelburne by the thousands, precisely because of its small-town lifestyle.

That tide is likely to continue as housing prices and congestion escalate in the GTA. Projects already in the works will see the population increase to 10,000. And the town is two years into an environmental assessment of an expansion to its sewage treatment plant. If approved, the town could grow to 14,000.

Though 800 new homes have already been built and the municipal workforce has grown only marginally, residents have not seen a decrease in property taxes. Instead, the town is investing the additional revenue in capital projects, and those required for further growth. Several streets in the old part of town have been rebuilt. The arena, library and fire department have gone through expansions, and the police department is next.

Shelburne is stretching into the countryside with developments like this one at the northeast edge of town. About 800 new homes have been built in recent years, and sold out quickly to eager buyers, many of them from the GTA. Photo by Rosemary Hasner / Black Dog Creative Arts.

From a business and employment perspective, the town is also growing. Gone are the days when Dufferin Oaks Long-Term Care Home was the largest employer. Now not only the town's but the county's largest employer is KTH Shelburne Manufacturing. It provides more than 500 jobs, and Dufferin Board of Trade reports more than 80 per cent are local people. Since 2014 more than $50 million has been invested in expanding the plant, which supplies parts to Honda's sprawling Alliston operation.

And bottled water company Ice River Springs recently relocated its head office to Shelburne from Feversham. Co-owner Sandy Gott says the company made the move so it could attract talent from larger population centres to the south. Overall, the Shelburne plant employs 115 people. Its innovative plastic bottle recycling operation, also located in Shelburne, is undergoing an expansion that will permit processing of 400,000 bottles per hour, up from 350,000. Ten additional jobs will be created.

John Telfer, who retired as Shelburne's chief administrative officer in August, reports anecdotally that the number of home-based businesses has also risen, among them a significant number of Google and Microsoft professionals who work from home.

The downtown is also enjoying renewed vitality. A fresh crop of owners has begun to take over some of the buildings, with their sights set on renovation. Intensification is the hot buzzword.

The historic town hall, with Grace Tipling Concert Hall on the second floor, remains a jewel of Main Street and the venerable Jelly Craft Bakery, for years the only place in the heart of town where you could buy a latte, a sweet treat or midday meal, continues to thrive. But some new draws have begun to pop up, including such eateries as Healthy Cravings Holistic Kitchen, Fiddleheads, Beyond the Gate and the Dufferin Public House. An enthusiastic booster of the town, Chris Petersons, proprietor of "the Duffy," lives in Hockley Valley, or as he prefers to call it, "suburban Shelburne." The licensed restaurants are a particularly welcome addition in a town where it has been hard to enjoy a drink with dinner in any establishment other than the Legion.

A commercial area is planned for the east side of town, and there is hope the population has now grown large enough to attract some chains and big box stores. The town has long struggled to tempt any of the approximately 7.8 million vehicles that pass through every year, on their way to and from Collingwood or the Bruce Peninsula, to stop and shop. Borrowing a page from Orangeville, the strategy is to appeal both to day trippers with a prettified downtown as well as the "which-way-to-Walmart" crowd.

Though the town's growth is the result of years of planning, like elsewhere in the GTA, the real estate market has been sizzling, and the new subdivisions sold out very quickly.

Prices have skyrocketed too. Realtor Lynda Buffett reports of the 134 homes sold in Shelburne in 2012, a little more than 80 percent were listed under $300,000, with the highest sale price at $388,000. By this year, the numbers had reversed. Of the 144 houses sold in the first seven months, 93 per cent were listed for more than $300,000, and the top price had shot up to $740,000.

One place 1870s William Jelly would be right at home is Shelburne town council, which is all white and all male. However, while council may not yet reflect the true face of Shelburne's blossoming diversity, the school system does. As does the population of the new subdivisions where the old mold of a conservative, white farm community no longer applies. Lots of those newcomers still commute to jobs in the GTA, though as one of them, Alton Stephenson, points out, given gridlock in Toronto, his hour drive to Mississauga is no worse than for many who commute across just a small part of the city.

I connected with a cross-section of local residents to find out what sort of impact such rapid growth is having on the town.

Nearly everyone I encountered identified one particular deficiency: a shortage of recreational opportunities, especially the lack of an indoor pool. While the town has invested in some facilities, such as the arena expansion and upgraded baseball diamonds, there's a demand for a wider range of programming to keep pace with the needs of girls, seniors and different cultural groups.

All the drive-through traffic that snarls downtown and the need for a bypass are other oft-repeated gripes – first raised in the middle of the last century.

Journalist Tom Claridge grew up in town in the 1940s, and three generations of his family owned the Shelburne Free Press and Economist from 1903 until he sold it in 2012. For much of that time, he says, the paper had an editor but no reporting staff. “News came in through the front door, literally. There was a mail slot for that purpose.” He recalls how the county-owned Dufferin Oaks came to be located in Shelburne, giving the town a rare win in its one-upmanship with Orangeville.

The county jail in Orangeville regularly housed 12 prisoners, of which only one or two had actually committed a crime. The rest were destitute people, often with dementia. The province eventually forced the county to provide more appropriate accommodation, and a battle ensued between Shelburne and Orangeville over where to build it. Orangeville’s proposed site was next to the railway tracks, and in those days a dozen trains a day passed through the town. Claridge says Shelburne loudly proclaimed Orangeville wanted to “put the old folks on the other side of the tracks.” Its argument must have held sway; Dufferin Oaks opened in Shelburne in 1962.

Claridge highlights an irony of the town’s expansion. “There’s been all this growth, but the town has so much less than it did when it was 1,200 people. It lost the hospital. It lost transit service to the city, which I used as a university student in the ’50s. Now it has even lost the car dealerships. There were three or four in my day.”

Overall, though, for most of those I spoke with, the positive outweighs the negative. There is a sense of pride and optimism, even excitement, about the future in the now not-so-little town whose motto is “A people place, a change of pace.”

LYNDA BUFFETT | REAL ESTATE AGENT & CO-CHAIR OF THE HERITAGE MUSIC FESTIVAL

Lynda Buffett, real estate agent and co-chair of the heritage music festival. "It used to be that the downtown was struggling, but right now it's doing quite well. That's a big plus from having more people moving into town." Photo by Rosemary Hasner / Black Dog Creative Arts.

Lynda Buffett is a familiar face to many in Shelburne. The longtime resident of a heritage home in the old part of town and one-time mayoral candidate has long been involved in community initiatives.

As a local realtor, she follows both the residential and commercial markets, and sees lots of positives to the town's burgeoning population.

Recently quite a few downtown commercial buildings have changed hands and the new owners are expressing interest in improving their properties. "It used to be that the downtown was struggling," Buffett says, "but right now it's doing quite well. That's a big plus from having more people moving into town."

Some owners have added more residential units above the commercial space. "That's important because these days you can't rent an apartment anywhere, not just in Shelburne," says Buffett. New

restaurants are starting to bring nightlife to the main street and that too she applauds as an improvement. “It used to be everybody rolled up the sidewalks at 6 o’clock.”

From a residential perspective, Buffett believes the new development has improved the local housing options. “Some people are move-up buyers from older Shelburne to newer and they’re able to stay in their community.”

Another plus: “The newer homes have certainly helped push up the pre-existing market. However, new homes tend to go up in price faster because they’re in bigger demand.” But the quality of the older homes has improved too. “Twenty years ago a lot of them were in really rough shape. Now it’s very seldom you see one like that.”

One shortcoming is a lack of small units. “There are folks who want to retire, and want to downsize, and that’s not something we have here.”

Following suit with the GTA, Shelburne’s real estate market has shifted over the past summer. “Even as recently as last spring, at any given time there might be 10 or 12 houses on the market in town, and things were selling like crazy,” Buffett says. “But right now we’ve got about 50 houses. The normal is between 36 and 40. Everybody is listing because they think prices are going to go way down, but I don’t think that will happen. It’s just we’re not going up at the pace we were.”

Buffett is also co-chair of the Heritage Music Festival, launched in 2016. The event is a rebranding of the fiddle festival. Though the core of the fiddlefest remains, the revamped event aims to offer a broader array of music that, as she says, “attracts all types of people, not just a certain segment.” This year’s headliner was roots-country star Corb Lund.

With its second year of the new program just wrapped up, things look promising. “The results were fantastic,” Buffett says. “Both financial and buy-in from the community. Attendance went way up.”

Perhaps more important, the event drew newcomers. “We’re starting to get a transition, so it’s not just the same old people who have been here forever.”

PAT HAMILTON | THE HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

Pat Hamilton, the high school principal. "You don't realize how isolated you can be until you start talking to people and find out why they're here, what their experiences have been." Photo by Rosemary Hasner / Black Dog Creative Arts.

Pat Hamilton is an upbeat, practical guy born and raised in Dufferin. This fall he takes up the post of principal at Orangeville District Secondary School, where he was once a student. But from 2011 to last spring, he was principal at Centre Dufferin District High School in Shelburne, and last year he was named one of Canada's top 40 principals by The Learning Partnership, a national charity that promotes public education.

Though the town's elementary school population has increased along with Shelburne's dramatic growth, the bulge has not yet hit the high school. People tend to move when their kids are still young, explains Hamilton. What has changed rapidly is the diversity of the student body. "I don't have statistics, but I'd bet if Shelburne's population grew 40 per cent, the school's level of diversity increased by almost as much."

The new students have backgrounds from all over the world, including the Caribbean, East Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe. There is also a large group of First Nations and Métis youth – in fact, the school has one of the largest Indigenous populations in the Upper Grand District School Board.

Regardless, says Hamilton, “Compared to when I went to high school, these kids are way more tolerant than we ever were. Whether it’s sexual orientation or being transgender – we have four or five transgender kids. We have FNMI [First Nations, Métis, Inuit] kids, we have visible minorities. In my day that would have been a recipe for a lot of tension.”

He acknowledges some people are quick to blame the newcomers for any problems that do arise. But with his long perspective, he says, “You get fights in a high school, you get conflict, you get bullies. That’s what happens when you put a thousand teenagers in one place. You can’t ignore when there is a race issue, but don’t call everything that. For example, a conflict might be about two boyfriends and a girl. Who cares what they look like – that’s what it’s about. It’s normal, everyday tension.”

Hamilton realized early on that approaching the school’s changing demographic as though it were a problem that needed solving was not a useful perspective. “This is not a sickness you need to get a shot for. This is who we are. This is who our community is.”

Hamilton was intrigued when some new students told him about a nonprofit youth mentorship and leadership program called One Voice One Team, run by former CFL football player Orlando Bowen.

In 2004, two Toronto police officers framed Bowen for drug possession, and beat him so badly it ended his career. Later one of the officers was charged with drug trafficking, and all charges against Bowen were withdrawn. The experience inspired him to start One Voice One Team.

Hamilton says working with Bowen changed everything. “We decided we weren’t going to focus on how we’re all different, but on what kind of community we want to build.”

He emphasizes the benefits of a diverse student population. “It’s incredible, their knowledge about the world, the way they see issues, it brings a whole other perspective to discussions in classrooms.”

What’s more, he says, discussions with parents from a wide range of backgrounds has him see the world very differently too. “You don’t realize how isolated you can be until you start talking to people and find out why they’re here, what their experiences have been.”

ALTON STEPHENSON | THE NEWCOMER

Alton Stephenson, the newcomer with his son Hayden, 10, at Glenbrook Elementary School. "I like the community, and I'm going to stay. I want to give back."

Alton Stephenson doesn't have time to sit down for an interview, so he multitasks, making supper. It looks delicious. It's a meal he must have made many times – his hands fly while he focuses on our conversation.

Stephenson moved from Brampton with his wife Alethia and two kids to a swank new house in Shelburne four years ago. He and Alethia commute, separately, to their jobs in Mississauga, about an hour each way.

Their 16-year-old daughter Amoy, a ballet dancer who has performed at the Pan-American Games and the Paralympics, still attends school in Brampton to pursue her dance training. Their 10-year-old son Hayden attends the local Glenbrook Elementary School.

Not long after arriving, Stephenson started a drop-in basketball program at Glenbrook. Open to all younger kids in the area, it runs regularly on two weeknights and now attracts about 30 kids. On Saturdays, he runs a similar program for high school students. "Some fathers come out to shoot some hoops too, and hang out with their kids."

Last year he also started coaching for the Orangeville Hawks basketball team. And he volunteers at his daughter's dance school. He is, as he says, "busy seven days a week."

What's behind it all? "I like the community, and I'm going to stay for quite a few years. I want to give back."

He's doing his part, but would like to see more activities available for young people, noting that kids tend to graduate and leave because "there's nothing for them here. We've already seen stories in the newspaper about kids and drugs up here. People think it's kids from Brampton doing that, but that's not it at all. People bring their kids up here when they're small to get them away from that before it starts."

And it's worse for girls, he adds. "In the city they can do dancing, swimming, gymnastics, all that kind of stuff. Here they mostly have to go to Orangeville."

He also has other quibbles with the town: the lack of GO transit and the smell that sometimes wafts from the sewage treatment plant. "We would like to sleep with the windows open at night instead of air conditioning, but the stench is enormous."

Still, Stephenson remains upbeat. "We don't have problems; we just have growing pains." And he's happy to see his new neighbourhood jelling. People help each other build decks and fences, and there are gatherings that stretch late into the evening. Many of the newcomers are from Brampton, some of them moved up together. "There are a few guys who drive for Brampton Transit," he says, "and a couple who drive for GO Transit."

He dismisses the notion that people move to Shelburne solely for cheaper housing. "Brampton got too saturated," he says. "There are too many people. There's no place to breathe. I grew up in a Metro Housing neighbourhood. I've always been around a lot of people and I just wanted to get away from it all."

HELEN FLEMING | THE LONGTIME BUSINESS OWNER

Helen Fleming, the longtime business owner. "… people speak to me and call me by name wherever I go." Photo by Rosemary Hasner / Black Dog Creative Arts.

Helen Fleming has some deep roots in Shelburne's business community. Not only has she owned Pete's Deli (formerly Pete's Donuts) at the corner of Highway 89 and County Road 124 for the past 23 years, she's also been active in the chamber of commerce and served on the board of MADD Dufferin. Her husband Bruce, now retired, was the third generation to own Fleming Dominion Hardware in town.

But Fleming is stepping back from the business this fall. "I was going to retire when I was 55, then 60, then 65, then 70, and I'm past all those," she says. "But I love the people, I love that contact. That will be the hardest part for me."

Pete's is Shelburne's modern-day version of the hometown coffee shop that has long existed in small towns across the country. With way more character than the chain alternatives, it's a boisterous, jovial place where the food is dependable and the faces are familiar. The bagels are piled high with cream cheese or other savoury temptations, and the sausage rolls are second to none. A large coffee with a muffin will set you back about $3.60.

While Fleming will continue to manage the paperwork from home, the restaurant will be run by what she describes as her “excellent” staff. She brought them on board with the proviso, “If you can’t find a little joke and some humour in a day, go find a job somewhere else.”

Fleming is pragmatic about the town’s growth. “It’s good news and bad news. When it was a tiny town, 23 years ago, you knew everybody who walked in the door and it was a slower pace,” she says, “On Fridays now, I take the back lanes to get around town. I don’t want to take Main Street because I know how clogged it’s going to be.”

She also feels the town needs to step up to the plate when it comes to amenities. “The growth is going to require a lot of money that I’m not sure the town is prepared to pay, because residents are going to demand more things.”

However, she adds, although there were some initial challenges, the town’s expansion population has been good for her business. “Two years before Tim Hortons’ arrival, I decided to take donuts right out of the lineup. Still, I lost a lot of business when Tim Hortons first came in.” Gradually, though, the added population began to take up the slack.

Of the pace of growth, she says “No, I don’t think it has been too fast. I think it has been a long time coming. And I don’t see a detriment to the increased population. I see it as a positive thing.”

True to her engaging nature, when asked if she has begun to develop relationships with the newcomers, Fleming says, “Apparently I have, because people speak to me and call me by name wherever I go.”

BOB CURRIE, WALLACE ELGIE, & BILL BENTLEY | THE COFFEE KLATSCH

From left: Bob Currie, Wallace Elgie and Bill Bentley, with Al Widbur, also a Pete's regular. "The thing is, there's nothing you can do about [Shelburne's growth]. You can't stop it. All you can do is try to plan for it and manage it." Photo by Rosemary Hasner / Black Dog Creative Arts.

Humorist Dan Needles launched the prototype for his hugely popular Wingfield Farm series of plays in the 1970s when he was editor of the Shelburne Free Press and Economist. The plays, which put Shelburne on the map as Larkspur, grew out of a column he wrote to fill space in the paper.

As Needles, now a columnist with this magazine, recounted in a 1995 profile, "There wasn't a whole lot of news in Shelburne. There were 26 issues that were warm-up fiddle contest issues, and there were 26 wrap-up issues. The crossover was sometime in February.

"I used to go across the street to the Gulf station after the paper came out and I'd hand my paper to the guys and sit on the Coke cooler while they'd read it in about 30 seconds. And they'd say, 'Well, that was a great effort, Dan, but now we'll tell you what really happened,' and you couldn't print any of it. There was lots happening, but it was all Local-Minister-Runs-Off-with-Organist stuff that you couldn't parlay into a straight news story."

For a couple of decades now, Pete's Deli has taken over as the meeting place for a group of old-timers who drink coffee, chew the fat and tell stories that will never make it to print. As owner Helen Fleming good-naturedly quips, "They get here at three, and they stay … forever."

On this day Wallace Elgie, aged 91, sits with Bill Bentley, who chooses not to reveal his age. Elgie has spent his whole life around Shelburne and says he can remember when the population was 1,300. Bentley has spent most of his life here too. Both are still on their farms.

They're joined by Bob Currie. Currie is the newcomer in the bunch – he has been in the area only 53 years. He's still on his farm too, though he also had careers as a real estate agent and longtime politician and mayor of Amaranth Township. As those who know him would attest, he's rarely caught without an opinion, or the willingness to express it.

One thing that isn't like it used to be decades ago in Dufferin: farmer fashion. At least, to this farm boy's eye. The peaked caps are still *de rigueur*, but these guys are sporting some serious going-to-town-on-Saturday-night attire, with button-down shirts in tasteful check patterns. There isn't a pair of green farmer pants or a manure-covered rubber boot to be seen.

Confronted by some fool journalist, Elgie and Bentley defer to their media-savvy companion.

About Shelburne's growth, Currie says, "The thing is, there's nothing you can do about it. You can't stop it. All you can do is try to plan for it and manage it." Overall, he sees Shelburne's development as a positive thing, pointing to the expanding commercial sector and big employer KTH Shelburne Manufacturing.

Like dozens of businesses in the region, KTH supplies Alliston's Honda plant, which itself employs about 4,600 people. And it's on this point Currie offers up a scenario that makes folks lean in. There have been efforts to establish a union at Honda for several years. Speculating on what the company's response might be should that take place, he paints a picture reminiscent of the cancellation of the Avro Arrow in 1959 and the devastating impact that had on local employment. "Imagine what would happen to this area if Honda pulled out. Thousands and thousands of people would be out of work."

SANJAY LEKHI | THE PHARMACIST

Sanjay Lekhi, the pharmacist. "Because I had already worked in Shelburne, I knew this was where I wanted to be. The people are really nice and friendly, and they already know I have the skills and expertise." Photo by Rosemary Hasner / Black Dog Creative Arts.

Sanjay Lekhi did his homework before opening a business in Shelburne. After emigrating from India in 2000 and fresh from obtaining his pharmacist's licence in 2004, he spent four years working at the town's No Frills supermarket pharmacy. In 2007 he was recognized as Pharmacist of the Year in the Loblaws Zone Eight region – an accolade determined by confidential customer reviews.

For two years after that, Lekhi says, "I wanted to explore what other communities are out there, so I did locum work all over southwestern Ontario, and a little bit up north." The next step was a three-year stint as owner of Shoppers Drug Mart in Fergus.

However, Lekhi says, "I always wanted to start my own family business – that was the goal. Because I had already worked in Shelburne, I knew this was where I wanted to be. The people are really nice and friendly, and they already knew I have the skills and expertise." He adds that the rapid population growth was also a big factor in his choice of location.

So in 2013 he and his wife Shalini opened Shelburne Town Pharmacy in a busy plaza that also houses Foodland and Giant Tiger. They commute there from their home in Orangeville.

Over a busy 15 minutes in the store, it's clear this is a bustling hub where it seems everyone is on a friendly, first-name basis, or even more casual. Without introduction, a tall teenager passes Shalini a prescription, saying nothing more than, "Mom will be in to pay for it." She smiles and nods, then sets about filling it.

"Customer service is in our hearts," Lekhi says, "so that's why it's not difficult to remember a person's name." Of his diverse clientele, he adds, "As a human being, every person would like to be treated with respect and cheerfulness – I think that's the bottom line."

It would seem to be a winning strategy. Lekhi says that so far, "It has worked out much better than expected. We probably have thousands of patients now, and we started from zero. So to get to this point is a big deal."

Another significant focus is community involvement. Three years ago Lekhi started an annual fundraiser for Sick Kids hospital, held the Saturday after Victoria Day at the store. This year's edition raised about $4,900. Last spring he also opened a telemedicine walk-in clinic in a space behind the pharmacy. A registered nurse is onsite weekdays, and patients consult with doctors via video link to an organization called Good Doctors, located in Sudbury. Lekhi covers the cost of rent and overhead.

Of all the effort it has taken to build his successful business, Lekhi says, "You definitely have to work hard when you're an immigrant."

It takes a community for everyone to thrive.

#3 – FROM THE BRINK OF BUST TO BOOM: SMALLTOWN SUCCESS STORIES

STRATFORD

SEPTEMBER 6, 2015 | ELLEN FLOWERS & GORDON PIM

"Stratford has grown up around the Festival, maintaining its historical and natural beauty, while also encouraging small businesses that cater to both the local and tourist populations. Shops, restaurants, small inns and B&Bs abound. Because of the Festival, Stratford now boasts an internationally acclaimed chef's school, a public art gallery, a music festival and many other cultural activities, existing in a remarkable symbiotic relationship."

Anita Gaffney, Executive Director, Stratford Festival

It's hard to imagine either Stratford or Niagara-on-the-Lake being where they are today without their world-renowned theatre festivals. But, before these festivals opened their doors, both small towns had other identities entirely. By adapting to change, these communities avoided becoming outmoded or marginalized. Elements of each town's unique history, geography and architectural character helped make them ideal locations for their respective festivals.

Stratford, incorporated as a city in 1885, had already enjoyed a boom time. With a burgeoning manufacturing industry aided by the Canadian Pacific Railway that ran through and dominated the town, Stratford quickly became a thriving commercial centre along the Avon River. So successful was the railway development that, in the early 20th century, a number of local advocates – particularly local businessman R. Thomas Orr – had to fight to prevent the scenic Avon waterfront from being developed by the railway. But the Great Depression devastated the community's economy and the city's industrial base slowly declined.

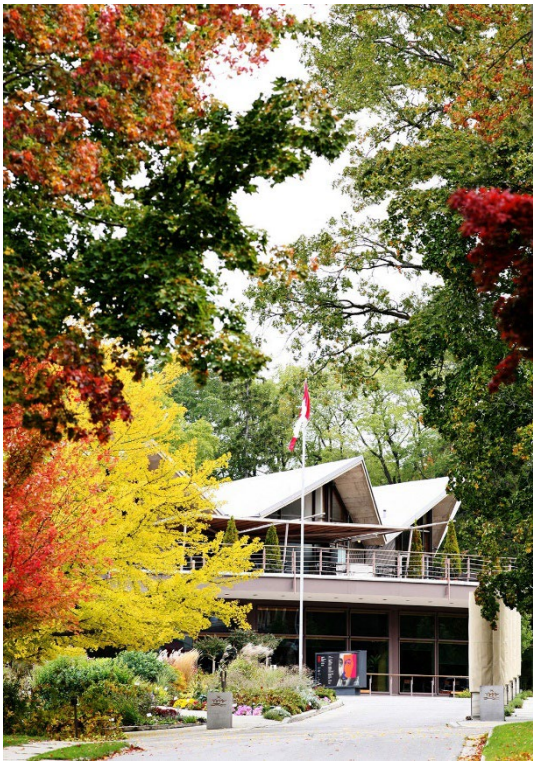

Photo by Erin Samuel

But people did not give up on Stratford. Orr was instrumental in developing the extensive parks system that still runs along the river. Orr also developed links between his city and the birthplace of William Shakespeare.

Tom Patterson, inspired by the beauty of his hometown, became obsessed with establishing a theatre festival that would put Stratford on the map. In 1952, Patterson established the committee that would become the Festival's board of directors. Later that year, with assistance from Canadian director Dora Mavor Moore, an introduction was made between Patterson and British director Tyrone Guthrie (who became the Festival's first Artistic Director). Guthrie was intrigued by the opportunity to launch a Shakespearean festival.

The Stratford community rallied around Patterson and the Festival. Local citizens became volunteers on the gates and at the box office, and even opened their homes to provide accommodations for the actors and theatre patrons. The Stratford Festival opened to rave reviews on July 13, 1953 with a production of *Richard III*.

Today, the Stratford Festival remains the city's largest employer, generating approximately $140 million in economic activity annually. The community still rallies around the internationally acclaimed festival and enjoys significant economic spin-off – with restaurants, bed and breakfasts, and local shops all benefiting from the hundreds of thousands of tourists flocking to Stratford each year.

Stratford has become synonymous with the arts in Canada and is a leading contributor to the growth of the city's creative economy. This vitality has also encouraged the development of a progressive business park and has attracted the University of Waterloo to open a campus in Stratford that specializes in digital media and technology.

Moreover, Stratford's heritage conservation renaissance over the last 25 years has been fuelled by the success of the Festival. In recent years, a large number of historical buildings in Stratford have been adapted to house services and businesses that directly and indirectly support the Festival. Additionally, a heritage conservation district protects the downtown.

NIAGARA ON THE LAKE

SEPTEMBER 6, 2015 | ELLEN FLOWERS & GORDON PIM

Niagara-on-the-Lake has a similar history that places it firmly on the map as far back as the arrival of John Graves Simcoe and the American Revolutionary War. Following the War of 1812, when much of the town was destroyed, Niagara-on-the-Lake slowly regained its economic health. But its preferred geographic location was further eclipsed in the 1830s when the Welland Canal was built.

Despite these setbacks, the town continued to expand throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. Tourism blossomed during the 1870s when hotels started to appear. Leisure activities flourished and some summer tourists eventually became year-round residents.

By the mid-20th century, however, Niagara-on-the-Lake was seen as somewhat adrift. Visitors and residents alike referred to it as quiet and unhurried or just plain dull. While it could still boast beautiful historical buildings, some of them were falling into disrepair. With steamers and trains now bypassing the town, sleepy little Niagara-on-the-Lake was slowly disappearing.

Then, in 1962, the town's outlook changed. Brian Doherty, a Toronto lawyer who had moved his practice to Niagara-on-the-Lake, brought together a small group of people to generate ideas to revitalize the town. The conversation almost immediately turned to theatre – Doherty's passion. He had not only written for the stage (and enjoyed modest success on Broadway), but he had also produced theatrical productions and was on first-name terms with several leading London and New York actors. When the

discussion turned to their preferred focus, George Bernard Shaw's name rose almost immediately to the top of the list.

With a local organizing committee, the backing of an enthusiastic town, an obliging council and with actors and a director secured, the "Salute to Shaw" – as the first season was known – opened on June 29, 1962 with a production of *Don Juan* in Hell, followed by *Candida.* The Shaw Festival was born.

The historical setting and natural beauty of the town has played a large role in how The Shaw has marketed itself. The town of Niagara-on-the-Lake is steeped in tradition, with many families able to trace back their roots to the War of 1812. Careful consideration of local traditions and sensitivities of those living in the town for many years has impacted how The Shaw has done business, how we communicate to our local audience and how we partner with local businesses. (Odette Yazbeck, Director of Public Relations, Shaw Festival)

In the years following the Festival's launch, interest in architectural preservation grew in the community. The town became known as a centre for conservation expertise and many of its landmarks were restored and rehabilitated in the 1970s. In 1986, the town designated its downtown core a heritage conservation district. In 2003, it became a National Historic District – another example of how the arts and culture served as the catalyst for a renewed interest in heritage conservation and pride of place.

Since the Shaw Festival emerged, Niagara-on-the-Lake has flourished, contributing over $75 million to the local economy each year. the Shaw Festival – while spending money locally on accommodations, restaurants, shops and attractions.

Throughout the centuries, the towns of Stratford and Niagara-on-the-Lake have each contributed to Ontario's heritage in unique and compelling ways. Yet each place has also influenced the founding of their festivals through economic circumstances, geography and supportive communities. As these festivals grew and prospered, so too did the communities. It begs the question: Who saved whom?

NORFOLK COUNTY

Norfolk County, Ontario, once the thriving heart of Canada's tobacco industry, faced a formidable challenge when the tobacco market crashed. Once hailed as the mecca of tobacco farms, the region was confronted with the specter of ghost towns as its primary economic driver withered away. The sprawling tobacco fields, which had long been the lifeblood of the community, stood desolate, signaling an uncertain future for the county.

Years later, Norfolk County has undergone a remarkable transformation. The once ubiquitous tobacco plants have given way to a diverse array of crops—fields of asparagus, soybeans, knee-high corn, blueberries, raspberries, and ginseng now paint the landscape. This agricultural renaissance has been paralleled by a cultural and economic revival, earning Norfolk County the moniker of the "new" Niagara-on-the-Lake. Local residents have embraced their entrepreneurial spirit, turning the region into a haven for wineries, craft breweries, and charming historical bed and breakfasts, reimagining

Norfolk County as a vibrant destination for tourists and a testament to the community's resilience and ingenuity.

2018 | JIM BYERS

PORT DOVER, ONTARIO – I'm feasting on a trio of fine tacos on the sunny patio at Burning Kiln Winery, a few minutes outside of this city.

Dusty Zamecnik of Hometown Brew Co., who I met during a tour of the area last year, spots me and comes over to shake hands, "Welcome home," he says.

I've taken trips to the north shore of Lake Erie almost every summer the past few years and I definitely feel at home. I've grown to love the towns and the rich farmers' fields and the beaches, not to mention the great food and wine and craft beer. But I think it's people like Zamecnik – friendly, outgoing, no-nonsense small-town folks – that seal the deal for me.

I started my latest visit at The Beach House, a fun spot on the beach in Port Dover. Over a fine and substantial lunch of fresh perch tacos, owner Peter Knechtel tells me about the **famous** palm trees that tower over the beach in front of his restaurant.

Photo by Jim Byers

"A builder in town years ago was trying to draw attention to his business and put one out in from of his place. I thought it was a good idea, so I had four of them brought in for the summer.

Port Dover's beach is wonderful; a deep stretch of sand near a quiet harbour with a pretty lighthouse. The town has tons of t-shirt places and shops selling inflatable surf toys, sandals and other summer necessities. There's a steady stream of folks heading from the beach to The Arbor, a long-time fixture in town that sells burgers, hot dogs, fries and an orange-flavoured soft drink called a Golden Glow.

We drive through fields of asparagus, soybeans, knee-high corn, blueberries, raspberries, ginseng, tomatoes and more as we head to Charlotteville Brewing, a stylish craft beer spot that's housed in an atmospheric old barn that the owners had brought in from near London. Their retail space opened only a couple months ago.

Melanie Doerksen and her husband, Tim Wilson, make excellent beer, including a fun IPA called Hopsy Dazy. Their place is decorated with flowers, antique chests and telephones and a beautiful bar top fashioned from a fallen tree, plus other bits that make the place feel more like a boutique winery than a beer place. There's also a beautiful loft that they use for meetings and even yoga.

From there it's over to Ramblin' Road Brewery Farm in the village of La Salette, where they make a variety of tasty beers, including one where the beer is washed over sliced, local potatoes, which they also use to make kettle chips. It's a light beer that tastes almost as much like wine as it does beer.

They also make a true red beer and a fun apple wit beer.

Owner John Picard, who started off in the peanut and snack business, tells me he enjoys making interesting brews, "Craft beer is all about being a little off the wall," he tells me.

Picard said tobacco was once the king crop in these parts, but that places like Ramblin' Road and Charlotteville Brewing are putting Norfolk County on the map these days and helping rejuvenate communities.

I didn't get a chance to try one, but there's also an on-site restaurants with a series of burgers on the menu. Come to think of it, I forgot to pick up a bag of kettle chips.

A few minutes away in the city of Delhi is the Second Mouse Cheesetique, where owner Teresa Wybo sells a variety of excellent cheeses, as well as olive oils and other gourmet delights.

"Folks told me the shop wouldn't work in Delhi but here I am," Wybo tells me. "I thought if I was good enough and unique it would work. People come from all over to shop here.

New Limberg Brewing Company is another fine beer spot in the area; a fun and tasty brewery that's housed in an old school. You'll find old blackboards in the tasting room, as well as games and Dutch foods, the owners having moved to Canada from Holland. The emphasis here is on Belgian beers, but they also made a spiffy maple beer for Canada Day. In addition to fine beer they have live music nights, as well as karaoke, trivia and movie nights.

The highlight of my Port Dover visit is an afternoon bike ride and food tour with Red Apple Rides, a leisurely ride of roughly 16 km's that took us to the Frisky Beaver Winery, a stunning hillside B&B and along the coast of Lake Erie, where we sampled some Burning Kiln wine on Muskoka chairs overlooking the lake.

Owners Phil and Marie Poss give us hot dogs to sample from The Arbor, adding fresh locally produced cucumbers, tomatoes, onions and other bits. From there we cycle through a pretty municipal park and take in a small waterfall before stopping at Frisky Beaver, a fun (there's that word again) winery where they avoid taking themselves too seriously. In addition to the Frisky Beaver blend, they take leftover grape juice and bottle it under the label "Crappy Wine."

It's actually pretty decent stuff, and they do a nice job with their higher-end label, called Smoke and Gamble Cellars. We nibble on crackers, grapes and local cheeses as we sample the wines. But not too much, given we're on our bikes.

From there it's over to Clonmel Castle, an historic home that's been turned into a B&B with a massive lawn and lovely, distinctive rooms. One room is done up as a bit of a "Fifty Shades of Grey" theme, with a feathered boa, a book of erotic photographs and a set of toy handcuffs. Another room has a bust of Elvis Presley and a full-size suit of armour.

Photo by Jim Byers

It's an utterly delightful spot with a wonderful owner, Lynneee Chatelaine. We sit on the side porch and nibble on little sandwiches and cookies with tea and iced coffee on a hot July day. I make a note to stop in and chat with Chatelaine next time in the area, as she strikes me as someone with great stories to tell.

Phil and Marie tell us stories about local history as we roll along, soaking in views of lovely, deep green fields and rich farms as we make our way south to the lake. We pull up our bikes outside David's Restaurant, a lovely spot overlooking Lake Erie. There's a beautiful garden and seating area out back with Muskoka chairs and a glassed-in patio for windy days.

Phil and Marie have arranged steak skewers and glasses of rich, red wine from Burning Kiln for us at David's, where we sit outside and gaze on the wide, blue expanse of Lake Erie. We ride past beautiful, tidy homes and farms on our way back to town, where our final stop is for fresh perch and cold, local beers at the Erie Beach Hotel, where they were putting the finishing touches on a rooftop bar that promises to add another great element to a wonderful Ontario beach town.

I spend the night at Long Point Eco Lodge, where they have marvellous tents done up in fine style, with comfortable beds and all the other comforts of a hotel room, including free Wi-Fi. They have several cottage-like units as well, and a new breakfast room with fine views out over Long Point and Lake Erie.

There's an on-site planetarium, as well as a zipline course, axe-throwing and other activities. I've stayed there on both my recent visits to the area and always look forward to it.

Back in town I tour the Port Dover Harbour Museum, where I read great stories about local pioneers, including Abigail Becker. The story goes that Becker on one stormy November day saved the life of seven sailors who were shipwrecked on the shoals of Long Point, where she lived in a one-room cabin with several children. Her husband was away, and Becker is said to have waded into chin-high water to save the sailors' lives.

They say Becker loved few things more than sitting in the shade of her cottage, sitting in her rocking chair and smoking a pipe. She raised 17 children alone after her husband died. I'd have loved to have met her.

I tour some fine shops on Main Street in Port Dover, including The Dover Cheese Shop and Urban Parisian, where they sell lovely macaroons and lemon meringue pie and make a wonderful iced coffee latte. I also try another nearby craft beer spot, Concession Road Brewing in the nearby town of Jarvis. They make a variety of great seasonal beers and also feature locally made games in a former fire house.

My final stop is dinner at Lago, an attractive restaurant on Port Dover's Main Street that's run by chef Ryan Rivard, who's worked at a number of top restaurants across the country. He also runs The Combine and Mulligan's Public House at the Norfolk Golf and Country Club, both in nearby Simcoe.

Rivard tells me he's sticking to mostly tried and true Italian classics in a city where diners are still a tad conservative. He does a good pasta cacio y pepe but I found his carbonara with chicken much more interesting; a delightful dish I'd love to sample again.

I can't help but notice the tattooed sayings on his arms. One says "The real truth about it is nobody gets it right," one arm says. The other says, "The real truth about it is we're all supposed to try."

CONCLUSION

THE YEAR-ROUND MAGIC OF OPPORTUNITIES, EVENTS, PUBLIC ART, & PLACEMAKING

One big difference between successful vibrant downtowns and struggling downtowns: Successful downtowns are activated in all seasons.

Transforming town spaces into year-round hubs of activity through events, public art, and placemaking not only enhances the local economy but also fosters a sense of community and pride. Here are some reasons why to embrace the importance of keeping small town downtowns active for every season.

ECONOMIC BOOST BEYOND SUMMER

Small towns often rely on tourism during the summer months to boost their local economies. However, a thriving downtown can generate year-round revenue. By hosting events such as winter festivals, holiday markets, or fall-themed gatherings, businesses in the downtown area can attract visitors and keep the local economy vibrant even when the temperature drops.

FOSTERING COMMUNITY CONNECTION

A lively downtown acts as a gathering space, fostering a sense of community among residents. Events throughout the year provide opportunities for people to come together, celebrate local traditions, and build relationships. Whether it's a spring art fair, a fall harvest festival, or a winter holiday parade, these events strengthen the social fabric of the community, creating lasting connections between residents and local businesses.

PUBLIC ART AS A CATALYST FOR CHANGE

Public art has the power to transform small town downtowns into vibrant, visually appealing spaces. Murals, sculptures, and installations can tell the town's story, create a unique identity, and even become tourist attractions. Embracing public art in all seasons ensures that the downtown area remains visually engaging, drawing both locals and visitors alike throughout the year.

PLACEMAKING FOR A WELCOMING ATMOSPHERE

Placemaking involves transforming public spaces into welcoming and engaging environments. It goes beyond physical changes to include programming and events that make these spaces enjoyable. By incorporating placemaking strategies, small towns can create lively, inviting downtowns, enhancing the overall experience for residents and visitors alike, regardless of the season.

DIVERSIFYING CULTURAL OFFERINGS

Each season brings its own charm, and by curating events that reflect the uniqueness of each time of year, small towns can diversify their cultural offerings. From spring concerts in the park to fall film festivals and winter art installations, providing a variety of experiences ensures that there's always something happening in the downtown area, catering to different interests and demographics.

So, let’s start making sure that ‘sidewalk grey’ isn’t the predominate colour and theme of your small-town downtown in winter and shoulder seasons.

The key to sustaining a thriving small town downtown lies in recognizing its potential beyond the warm summer months. Through year-round events, public art installations, and thoughtful placemaking, these spaces can become lively hubs that contribute to the local economy, strengthen community bonds, and celebrate the town's identity in all seasons. Embracing the year-round magic of downtowns ensures that they remain vital, dynamic spaces that locals are proud to call their own.

CLAYBELT AGRICULTURE & THE ART OF CRAFT WINE & BEER

In the Claybelt region of Northern Ontario, located around the 49th parallel, certain crops suitable for alcohol production can thrive due to the unique soil and climatic conditions. Here are some of the crops that grow well in this region and can be used for alcohol making:

BARLEY

- Use: Barley is a key ingredient in beer and whisky production.
- Growing Conditions: Barley thrives in the cool, moist climate of Northern Ontario. The Claybelt's rich, fertile soil is well-suited for barley cultivation, which requires well-drained soils.

RYE

- Use: Rye is used in the production of whisky, especially Canadian whisky.
- Growing Conditions: Rye is a hardy crop that can withstand the cold temperatures of the region. It grows well in the Claybelt's heavy soils and is tolerant of less fertile conditions.

CORN (MAIZE)

- Use: Corn is a primary ingredient in many spirits, including bourbon and other types of whisky.
- Growing Conditions: While corn generally prefers warmer climates, certain varieties can be grown in the shorter growing season of the 49th parallel. The clay-rich soil can support corn growth with proper management.

HOPS

- Use: Hops are essential for brewing beer, providing bitterness, flavor, and aroma.
- Growing Conditions: Hops can be grown in cooler climates and benefit from the long daylight hours of Northern Ontario's summer. The Claybelt's well-drained soils are suitable for hop cultivation.

POTATOES

- Use: Potatoes are used in the production of vodka.
- Growing Conditions: Potatoes grow well in the Claybelt's fertile soils and can tolerate the cooler growing conditions of the region.

BERRIES (E.G., BLUEBERRIES, RASPBERRIES)

- Use: Berries can be used to produce fruit wines, liqueurs, and craft spirits.
- Growing Conditions: The Claybelt region supports the growth of various berries, which thrive in the slightly acidic, well-drained soils and benefit from the cool climate.

APPLES

- Use: Apples are used in the production of cider and apple-based spirits like apple brandy.
- Growing Conditions: Certain hardy apple varieties can thrive in the colder climate of Northern Ontario, especially with proper care and frost management techniques.

Overall, the Claybelt region's unique combination of climate and soil conditions supports the growth of a diverse range of crops that can be used in alcohol production. These crops provide a robust foundation for local craft breweries, distilleries, and wineries, contributing to the region's agricultural and economic development.